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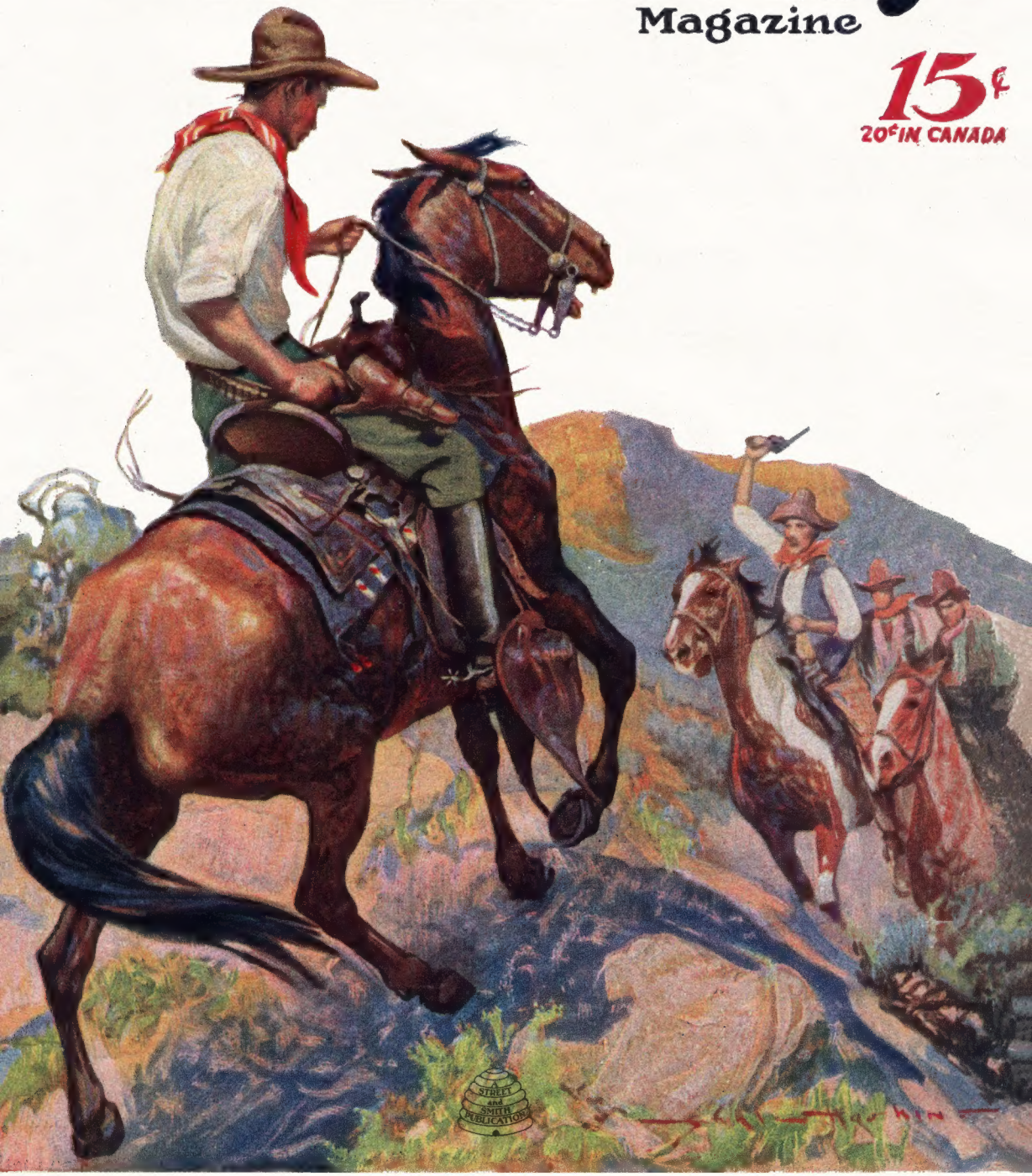

RIVALS OF THE RANGE

By Robert J. Horton

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Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 Six Months, $3.00 Single Copies, 15 Cents

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Dupe of the Desert

By GEORGE GILBERT

A dauntless bronc-buster cheats his dark fate by taking the desert trail that leads to gold, a girl—and something better than either.

Branded "N. G."

By KENNETH PERKINS

Heavy was the hand that placed the brand of shame on Jim Delong, but he was not the man to give up without a fight.

Cooped!

By HARLEY P. LATHROP

It was the homesteader's driving urge to establish a ranch that led him along the tortuous path of fire and crime.

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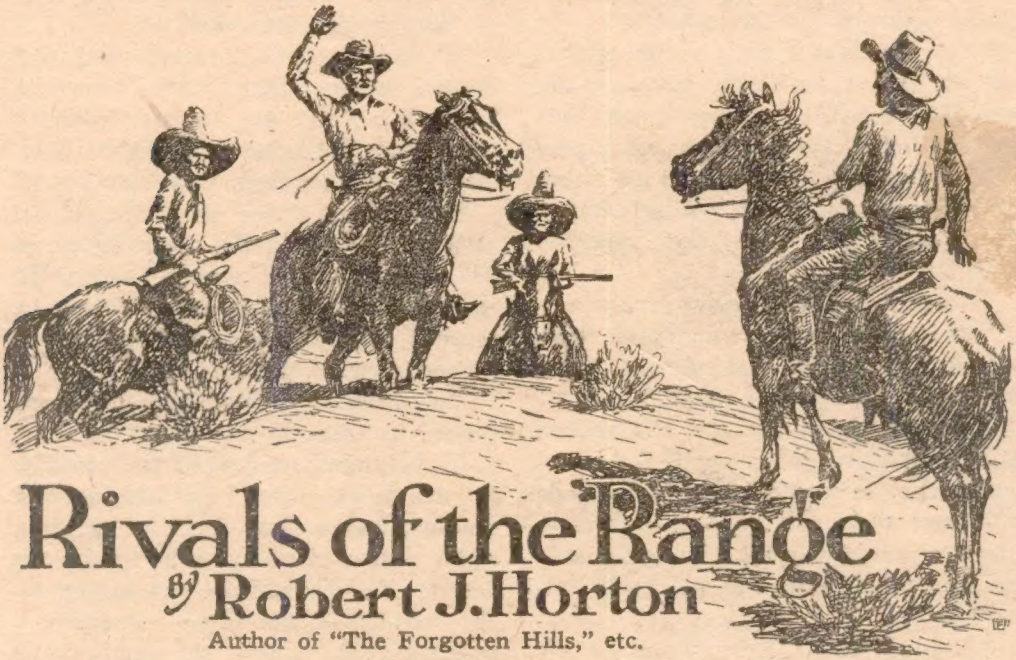


Rivals of the Range

By Robert J. Horton

Author of "The Forgotten Hills," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AN OASIS.

THREE men, riding nearly waist high in the juniper, intercepted a fourth horseman atop the ridge. Two of the trio were Mexicans, and all presented the appearance of cowhands, with their chaps and soft shirts, their riding boots and tall sombreros. The white man of the party, who was evidently acting as leader, addressed the newcomer.

"Warm traveling," he observed, noting with his keen black eyes the dust that powdered the other's riding boots and breeches.

"You come from the desert?" he continued. It was plain from the tone of the spokesman of the trio that they knew such to be the case.

"As you must easily have guessed," drawled the horseman, shifting his weight in the saddle slightly in order to ease the gun on his right thigh.

The Mexicans edged their horses a little more to each side of him.

"Your name, señor? We have reason for asking—if you don't mind."

"Boyd," answered the other readily. "Bart Boyd."

"I see," said the spokesman, nodding gravely. "From quite a way south—the border, maybe?" he demanded.

The man who had announced him-

self as Bart Boyd surveyed his questioner coolly. "Is it so important?" he countered with a slight frown.

The other man shrugged and looked quickly at his Mexican companions who sat their horses in stolid, sullen silence.

One of them flashed his teeth in a quick grin of derision. The white mark of a scar paled on his chin for an instant. Boyd caught sight of it as his glance followed the spokesman's.

"No, I reckon it ain't so important; but we like to know who folks are an' how far they're traveling when they come in here. We don't see many people. It's sort of closed cattle an' sheep country, you might say. Which way?" The spokesman put the question sharply.

"North," was the prompt reply.

"Ah! Beyond the mountains there are cities, Boyd, and—a railroad. You can make it easy in a week!"

The spokesman for the trio moved aside, and Boyd did not wait for a second hint. He waved a hand as he rode northeast along the ridge. But from time to time he twisted a bit in the saddle to make sure he was not being followed.

"A tough outfit, I could tell by the signs," he muttered to himself. "I wonder why they were so anxious for information? Meant business, too. Working a ranch? We haven't seen a sign of a ranch, have we, hoss?"

The sturdy little cow pony traveled on without respect for this query.

After a couple of miles the rider drew rein and surveyed the panorama before him with an interest which its desolation did not seem to warrant. One, studying his face, would have been impressed by its youthful expression, by the clearness and sparkle of the eyes, by the clean-cut features. But there was an alertness in the man's manner, a keenness in his squinting gaze that told of experience extraordinary for one of his years.

He looked first dowr into the great bowl of the desert on the east and then behind him. It happened that the high ridge was really the crest of a low range of hills that shut in the desert on the east and north. The range was in the form of a crescent which flattened eventually to the desert floor, forming a low pass or easy entrance to the bowl. It was this entrance that claimed most of Bart Boyd's attention.

"I reckon that's a ranch and that there's water there," he remarked. "Anyway, we've got to have refreshment, and that's the first sign of habitation I've seen since yesterday noon."

He squinted at the sun. "I can just about make it by dusk," he reflected, as he rode on down, circling about the ridges. He stopped again when he reached a vantage point where he had a good view of the area below.

He whistled softly, and his pony cocked its ears.

In the place just west of the entrance to the bowl, where he had seen a shadow, was a small ranch or rather a small farm—virtually a house in the desert. Boyd's whistle was caused by the verdure of the place. It shone a brilliant green against the yellow bowl of the desert—like a small emerald on a large topaz.

"Water there, all right," thought Boyd to himself. "Water *there!*"

As he resumed his way down the sloping decline he saw some small corrals off to the left. There was a small barn behind the house. But there was no cattle near; scant evidence that the house was a "home" ranch.

As he rode around a bare point and approached the house, his wonder and admiration increased. He saw some fruit trees, paloverde and spreading mesquites that must have been fifty feet high. A tamarack hedge grew within the fence. And through the opening in the trees near the gate he saw green grass in front of the house, while red

geraniums clustered about the steps to the little porch.

He dismounted at the gate and, leaving his bridle reins dangling, walked up the path to the house. He had not reached the steps when he stopped abruptly; his hat came off with a jerk, as he saw a girl cross the little porch to the top of the steps and look down at him. The sunset struck golden gleams in her hair above dark, luminous eyes in which there was both a welcome and a question.

"Good evening," said Boyd with a bow. "I've come a long way, and, seeing this beautiful oasis of yours, I thought I'd presume upon your hospitality to ask for water for my horse and myself."

"We have plenty, señor," came the soft voice. And a curtsy! Boyd's brows lifted slightly in appreciation of the girl's grace.

"Take your horse around to the gate in the west and put him in the corral or barn," she continued, pointing. "You will find feed and water there. But I'll send Benito to look after the señor's horse. Then you must come to the house to eat."

Boyd bowed again and wondered. There was a trace of an accent in the girl's voice indicating that she was of Spanish extraction.

"Would it not be best, señorita, if I told the men-folk of my presence first? It is customary, I believe?" He asked the question somewhat awkwardly.

"My father is not here," the soft voice said. "But Benito will show you where to go."

"Thank you," he said with a smile. "My name is Boyd. I am from the south."

She acknowledged his frankness with a smile. "I am Juanita Hale," she told him. "My father, John Hale, owns this place. You are welcome."

He rode around to the gate on the west, opposite the side from which he had approached the place. Two black eyes in a dark face regarded him with unblinking gravity as he dismounted at the barn.

"Hello!" exclaimed Boyd, startled at the sudden, silent approach of the Mexican boy. "You're Benito?"

"*Si,* señor," the boy answered. "I will take your horse." He reached for the reins.

"And I guess you know a lot about horses," said Boyd. "Mine's been ridden hard to-day." He turned the reins over to the boy, who gave him a quick smile.

"He will get the good care," said Benito in his soft accents.

Gold flashed in the gathering dusk, and the lad caught the coin which Boyd spun so expertly in the air.

"He's had practice at that," thought Boyd as he started for the house.

CHAPTER II.

VISITORS.

IF the guest was surprised at the exterior of the house and the beauty of the grounds, he was indeed astounded when Juanita Hale led him into the cool front room to await dinner. It was like being whisked on a magic carpet from the drab, desolate distances of yellow desert into a city home.

Hale must certainly be a money maker, he reflected. Such houses, furnished so splendidly, were practically unknown to Boyd in the desert interior. And he had seen no evidence of extensive cattle operations; nor was beef bringing any too good a price. But, pshaw! Hale could have made money elsewhere; he could have inherited it—and what business was it of his, anyway?

Suddenly he interrupted his meditations with a start, as he saw a man standing near him. He found himself looking into a pair of blue eyes—rather hard eyes, he thought, with an unnatu-

ral gleam in their depths. The man was dressed in the manner of a rancher. But he looked about like an ordinary business man.

Boyd noted that the newcomer seemed considerably interested in his own dress. The riding breeches seemed to hold his gaze. Slowly he raised his eyes and again looked into Boyd's with that disconcerting stare.

"I am John Hale," he said slowly in a tired voice. "Your name, I believe my daughter told me, is Boyd?"

"I am known as Bart Boyd," said the visitor, rising.

"You just arrived—from the south?" Hale inquired.

"Less than an hour ago, Mr. Hale. I saw your place from the hills west of here and came down for water. Your daughter was very hospitable and asked me to stay for the evening meal."

"You came here to see me?" Hale put in quickly with a sharp glance.

Boyd shook his head. "No, I didn't even know that this place was here. I am unfamiliar with this region."

"You're traveling through this country?" Hale put the slightest stress on the word "through."

"I was traveling north," Boyd explained. He was about to mention his meeting with the three men on the high ridge when some instinct caused him to withhold his words.

"You may as well stay, and rest your horse," Hale told him.

The girl appeared in the doorway and announced that the meal was ready.

In the dining room Boyd was impressed by the taste and quality of the room's appointments. As for his hosts, both possessed a measure of culture that amazed him.

They discussed topics of the outside world almost exclusively, and Boyd soon found that he was adroitly being led by the master of the house to do most of the talking. He spoke of cities and events; discussed affairs along the border; and finally led the conversation to the cattle situation.

"You have worked in cattle then?" Hale inquired politely.

"To some extent," Boyd confessed, rather shortly.

"We have some stock in here," said Hale; "but it isn't much. You are interested in cattle?"

"Not particularly," said Boyd easily. "As your guest, Mr. Hale, I must tell you that my business—if it *is* a business—is not one that I wish to discuss."

"We do not always find it necessary to discuss the occupations of our guests, Mr. Boyd." Hale put a certain emphasis upon his words.

Thereafter the conversation was rather constrained, and Boyd was not sorry when the meal was finished.

"I'll take a look at my horse before I turn in," he told Hale, who went out with him.

Instead of going directly to the barn Hale led the way to the right side of the big yard where Boyd saw what he had overlooked before—a small adobe structure.

Hale opened the door, struck a match and lighted a lamp on a table.

"You will be very comfortable here," said Hale with a gesture about the room.

Boyd thanked him, and remarked that he would seek some much-needed rest as soon as he had looked at his horse.

As Boyd walked slowly toward his quarters, after ascertaining that his horse had been well cared for, the thunder of hoofs came from the west gate, and three riders approached the barn. The yellow gleam of Benito's lantern shone on the faces of the men as they dismounted. The riders proved to be the trio who had accosted him on the ridge that afternoon.

"Nice company," he muttered as he entered his adobe.

He removed his boots and hat and gun belt in the darkness and threw himself wearily on the bed.

CHAPTER III.

AN INVASION.

BEING a sound sleeper, Bart awoke with a start, instantly alert. However, he took care not to move, although he had to exert all his will power to remain inert on the bed. For he was aware that there was movement in the room—movement that he could sense but could not hear. Boyd's right hand began to creep inch by inch up the bed to where the gun belt snuggled against him. His fingers touched the leather, the metal of the cartridges that filled the loops, the tip of the holster that held his weapon—then he encountered another hand.

There was a smothered exclamation! "Matias!"

Boyd struck as a weight fell upon him. He did not think of crying out. He doubled up his knees in an effort to throw his unknown enemy off and grappled with him. He found that the man was strong. He caught Boyd's right wrist by chance and held it in a veritable grip of iron.

Suddenly another crashing weight came down on Boyd, crushing him hard against the bed. A hand found his mouth and closed over it. Boyd bit deep into a finger, and a Spanish oath broke the stillness. Then he became temporarily unconscious from a blow on the jaw.

Before he fully recovered a voice hissed softly in his ear.

"Be still, señor, an 'twill be best."

Boyd shuddered involuntarily as he felt the cold steel of a flat blade against his throat.

There was still weight upon his legs, while hands felt swiftly over him. He smiled grimly in the darkness and gave up thought of resistance. The hands went on with their search. Every inch of his clothing was explored, his shirt and breeches' pockets were delved into and relieved of their meager contents. Boyd grinned as he thought of his slim wallet. But his teeth clenched with memory of his gun. He'd hate to lose that. The weight was now off him. And he suddenly realized that the robbers had fled!

He leaped from the bed and ran out the doorway. The shadowy yard was empty. The night was vivid of sound. He ran along the shrubbery, realizing as he did so the utter futility of it. Even though he should come up with them he would be unable to cope with them barehanded against their weapons.

"Señor!"

The word seemed to hiss on the still air and die suddenly.

Boyd looked quickly about. A shadow loomed near a spreading mesquite.

"Here, señor!"

The message was barely breathed on the air but Boyd recognized Benito's voice. He strolled toward him.

"Did they hurt you, señor?" asked Benito excitedly.

"No, *amigo, mio,*" said Boyd. "And if you *are* my friend, maybe you will let me have a cigarette."

"Be careful of the voice," warned the boy as he handed Boyd some cigarettes; "an' do not light heem here. It is not good any ones should see me."

"Did you see *them?*" asked Boyd pointedly.

The boy gestured gracefully. "I hear but no see."

"Well, can you tell me if those three men that rode in here to-night work here?" Boyd inquired.

"I can no say," was the other's reply. "Señor, I come to warn you. It will be no good for you to stay in thees countree. It is bad for you, maybe."

"Confounded robbers!" Boyd exclaimed. "What makes you think I need to be warned after this?"

"There are bad peoples both Mexican an' Americano, señor. You must be careful here. I go now," was the answer.

"Wait a minute, Benito," said Boyd. "Where is the nearest town—the town where they go from here?"

"Descansar," the boy replied. "East twenty, twenty-five mile."

"Descansar? Straight east?"

"Like a crow, señor, when you go out the way down there." He pointed in the direction of the entrance to the desert bowl.

"Gracias," said Boyd, offering the boy his hand. "And I mean that. Thanks, *amigo mio."*

The boy took the hand quickly, as if it meant a great deal to him.

Then Boyd walked thoughtfully back to his quarters. He struck a match to light the lamp and one of the cigarettes.

The light revealed his gun belt, gun, wallet, as well as the rest of his possessions, which he hastily examined.

"Didn't take a blessed thing!" he exclaimed aloud. "That beats me."

He sat for some time with a blank expression. Then a smile came to his lips. "Even left me my hat." He chuckled.

He still was smiling half an hour later when he fell asleep for the second time that night.

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN RIDES FORTH.

WITH the first blush of dawn Boyd was up and at the washstand. The cool water refreshed and invigorated him, and he stepped out of the adobe to greet the day with a smile.

He heard music of another kind than that of the birds and realized that it was Juanita singing.

He strolled through the fragrant yard to the front of the house to listen. But the singing soon stopped. As he turned back, Juanita came out, looking as fresh and beautiful as the morning. Boyd was so enraptured with her beauty that he stood motionless, forgetting to remove his hat until she greeted him.

"Señor is up with the birds," she said, smiling.

"And I've just been listening to the sweetest-singing bird of them all," he said. "You are quite wonderful, señorita."

She rewarded him with a radiant smile. He wondered if it were not rather lonesome for her in this spot, desolate, despite its beauty.

"You are never lonesome here, señorita?" he ventured.

"You just heard," she answered. "I have my piano, the birds, and father." He thought her tone a bit wistful.

At that moment, the door opened swiftly, and Hale came out. His eyes sought Boyd, who read in his glance both a warning and a threat.

The girl hastily went inside.

"Good morning, señor," said Hale gravely. "You rested well, I hope?"

"Quite well, Mr. Hale," said Boyd, holding the other's eyes. "But I was disturbed by a dream—a most realistic dream."

"Yes? The long ride, and you were tired, señor." Hale suggested, seeming but mildly interested.

"I thought that two men came into my room and attacked me while I was lying awake in the dark," Boyd told him. "One held a knife against my throat while the other went over me and examined my possessions. Then they fled, and when I struck a light I found my things scattered on the floor."

"Perhaps it was the heat," Hale replied, smiling. "You rode long in the sun, señor."

"Perhaps," said Boyd, rubbing the sore spot on his jaw where he had been struck."

"We will have breakfast, if you will be so good as to come in," Hale invited.

"Your guests have gone?" Boyd inquired casually as they went into the house.

"My guests?" Hale looked at him

quickly. "Oh!" He smiled. "Three men of the range near here who stopped overnight! I occasionally have callers like that."

Boyd was cheerful through the meal, and when it was over bade Juanita farewell in the presence of her father.

"You will ride far to-day?" asked Hale. "We have put up some food for you, and you must take it with you, and an extra canteen, señor?"

Boyd accepted the food but declined the extra canteen.

When he reached the barn, where Benito had his horse ready, he needed but a glance to tell him that his saddle roll behind the cantle had been inspected during the night.

"This town, Descansar—is it hard to find, Benito?" he asked the boy.

"Only at the pass, señor—at Diablo, the mountain crossing. It ees steep an' high, but your horse is good, señor," was the lad's reply.

After taking leave of his host, Boyd circled the verdant acre with its marvelous bubbling springs, rode rapidly down the bowl of the desert, around the point, out the wide entrance, and into another stretch of desert reaching eastward, girdled on the north and south by lava hills.

Far ahead he could see the faint, blue line of what he assumed to be a low ridge across the floor of the desert. Twenty or twenty-five miles, the boy had said. Boyd judged it all of thirty, maybe more. The pass, the boy had referred to, must be across that ridge or rib of the desert. But he discounted the boy's allusion to it as being so terrible.

Nevertheless, Boyd kept a strict vigil over the surrounding country, although he saw no sign of life except a small bunch of cattle grazing near the hills in the north. Those were the cattle he had seen from the west ridge the afternoon before, he decided.

It was considerably past noon when he drew near the ridge, which completely shut off the desert country to westward.

Boyd became more and more interested as he approached it. The outline of its crest was almost straight. Only in one spot, and that directly ahead, was there a jag in this outline.

"This must be Diablo," he muttered. "It's the only place I can see that looks anything like a pass."

He found the trail steep and dangerous as any he had ever seen. But he dismounted, wrapped the reins about the saddle horn, so that his horse would follow, and started up.

At the highest pitch they came to a place where the trail consisted of a series of steps cut out of the rock. For a minute or two Boyd hesitated. Only the most sure-footed of desert and mountain-bred horses could be trusted here. Diablo, indeed! The boy had been right.

Finally, they began the descent of the east side, which appeared, on the whole, easier for the pony than the ascent had been. He slipped and slid, but braced himself against the sides of the trail. And it took but little more than half an hour to reach the floor of the desert.

After stopping briefly for a rest and a smoke, he rode at a jog trot toward Descansar.

CHAPTER V.

STEEL AND LEAD.

DESCANSAR proved to be a cluster of adobe huts with a few larger adobes on either side of a short, dusty street. Clumps of paloverde and mesquite at the upper end of the street denoted the presence of springs.. The hot street was deserted as he entered the village, enveloped in a cloud of dust and flies. Dogs greeted him, but soon returned to their shaded retreats.

After leaving his horse at the livery

stable, he walked up the drab thoroughfare till he reached a long, low adobe over which hung a sign bearing the legend, El Presidio. He entered, and the change from the glare of the sun to the cool, darkened interior left him blind momentarily. When he could make out his surroundings, however, he became aware of a long, low room with a dirt floor. An ancient bar ran along one side, while, on the other, there were a few small tables, chairs and wooden benches. Most of those frequenting the place were Mexicans. Boyd strolled up to the bar, wiping his face and hands with a huge bandanna.

Two men approached him casually. He saw them out of the corner of his eye, but gave no sign that he did. Finally one of them spoke.

"It is a hot day to ride, señor."

Boyd recognized the voice as that of the white man whom he had encountered the day before. The Mexican with the scar on his chin was standing next to the spokesman.

"It depends on how one stands the heat," Boyd answered smoothly.

"I thought that you were going north, señor," came the meaningful reply.

Boyd turned slowly. He found the white man fondling his mustache and eying him shrewdly. The Mexican's orbs were glittering with excitement.

"Should it interest you so much?" Bart inquired. The soothing coolness of the place induced slow speech.

"But this is not north, señor," the white man insisted.

"Are you a patron of the compass, then?" Boyd asked, putting down his glass.

The man's eyes flashed, and he started to make swift reply; but the Mexican nudged him aside and spoke in his stead.

"Where did you come from, señor?"

"From a place in the desert, Matias!" Bart spoke the name with a stinging reflection.

The glitter in the black eyes sharpened; the scar gleamed white for an instant.

"*Si,* señor. Just so," came his smooth retort. "From what place in the desert, señor?"

"From a place where one dreams strange dreams, Matias," Boyd replied.

The scar glistened. "Does the señor tell his dreams to those who ask?" the Mexican pressed the question.

"Not if he thinks that those who ask already know about the dreams," Bart answered sharply. "It is not pleasant to dream of a knife against one's throat, Matias. It is a dream that one doesn't soon forget."

"Bah! You gringo, you are a word man! You talk!" the Mexican said contemptuously.

"And I mean what I say, you greaser!" The words came like cracks of a whiplash; and they lashed the Mexican's hot temper into a fury on the instant.

His right hand moved like lightning toward his left sleeve.

Then Boyd struck, straight from the shoulder, the blow landing square on the Mexican's brown jaw. He was knocked against his companion who stumbled and uttered an oath. Next instant the white man jumped clear; there was a swift movement at his right side, and flame spurted from Boyd's hip in the dimly lighted place.

The white man yelled and grasped his right hand in his left. Boyd's gun roared again, and the sombrero was knocked from the Mexican's head. There was a crash of splintered glass behind the bar.

Boyd snapped his smoking weapon back into his holster and leaped for the Mexican. Boyd caught him by the throat, shook him like a rat and threw him to the floor.

"The knife, Matias! Draw the knife!" the white man commanded.

Matias' right hand darted to his left sleeve, and an instant after it reached

its mark, Boyd's booted toe shot out. There was a flash of steel as the knife went spinning away.

Boyd stepped back with a queer laugh. "That's the way your knife dream has come true, Matias. Tell me, isn't that your name? Talk, you greaser, isn't that your name?"

He started toward the crouching Mexican, but felt a touch on the arm. He whirled, his gun hand going into action in the wink of an eye.

"Be calm, señor; it is a hot day and we are peaceful here," said a soothing, musical voice, soft with its Spanish accent.

Boyd saw a large, dark-faced man, dressed in the manner of the cities save for the fact that he wore an unusually large watch charm, big earrings, and a sombrero of such magnificance that Boyd couldn't help admiring it even in that moment of stress.

He noted, too, out of the corner of his eyes that the expression on the faces of the Mexican and his white companion had changed. They seemed to peer at the big man as if in awe.

"Besides," the big man continued, "I'm quite sure that his name *is* Matias. Will you do me the honor to drink something cool with me, señor? I pay homage to bravery, and efficiency," he added with a smile.

Boyd put up his gun. Matias and his companion moved away.

"With pleasure, señor," said Boyd agreeably. "As you say, it is really too hot to bother one's self with trouble."

CHAPTER VI.

A NOTICE.

THERE was an intangible something about the big man that immediately intrigued Boyd's interest. It wasn't his attire or his ornaments, for Mexicans often affected earrings and peculiar displays of jewelry. And the man, for all his swarthy complexion and soft Spanish accent, did not look like a Mexican or a Spaniard. He was nearly as tall as Boyd, very large, and still an impression of obesity did not assert itself. His corded hands suggested great strength. Boyd had not needed the servile glances of Matias and his companion to convince himself that the man was some kind of a leader.

"I do not ask your name, señor, nor your business. I drink to your continued calmness," the man remarked with a smile.

Boyd was so struck with this unusual toast, and the manner in which it was spoken, that he could think of no reply as they raised their glasses.

"Others are not so considerate as to my name and business," he said when they had drunk.

"Ah, señor! But others are not always blessed with good sense, is it not so?"

"My name is Boyd," was the irrelevant reply.

"The señor need not have told me," said the man in a tone of reproach. "But since you have been so good, I will tell you with whom you drink. They call me Don Herman for short. You would not mind a slight walk, Señor Boyd?" he continued. "It is only to the post office. Once a week a stage goes through on its way to the mines in the north and leaves the mail. It has but recently passed through this day."

"I will go," Boyd replied, reflecting that it was strange that he hadn't seen the stage if it had passed through within the last two or more hours.

As they moved toward the door, Matias appeared suddenly from the shadows of the dim interior.

"Your pardon," apologized Don Hermanùco, smiling at Boyd. He stepped a few paces away, while Matias said something to him. Then he turned back to Boyd.

"If the señor will excuse me for a moment, I will be with him."

"I can wait," Boyd put in. "I am in no hurry, Don Herman."

The other inclined the brim of his magnificent sombrero in ever so slight a bow and walked away into the shadows at the rear of the place with the Mexican.

In a little more than a minute he was back.

"Matias is suffering a great sorrow at having offended you, Señor Boyd," he explained, his eyes sparkling. "He wished me to explain, but I told him that he had already learned his lesson. Is it not so?"

Boyd knew instinctively that the Don lied. "That is up to him," he said.

"I reminded him of that, too," said the Don as he led the way, remarking about the heat, as they proceeded down the street and entered a small adobe which proved to be the post office. The Don walked directly to the little window in the rear of the small front room, while Boyd looked about him.

The walls of the place were fairly plastered with notices. Many of these were in Spanish, and a majority of them were reward notices bearing likenesses of criminals whom the various State authorities wished to apprehend.

Boyd glanced from one to another of the notices and marveled that so many of them should be posted in a town so small. Then a notice of a different character caught his eye. He read:

WANTED: A MAN

Knowing that it is useless to offer a reward for the capture of those who have been rustling my cattle, or for the return of the cattle, I have an attractive proposition for a man who is square and unafraid to patrol my range at something more than wages.

BUT THE MAN WHO TAKES THE JOB MUST BE THE GOODS.

FRANK GRAY, Bar X Ranch, Descansar.

Boyd read the notice twice and, as he turned, found the Don at his elbow.

The man smiled. "Very interesting, is it not, señor?"

"Do you think that I am a fugitive, Don Herman?" Boyd suddenly asked bluntly.

"Señor!" The Don made a gesture of reproach. "And if you were, señor, if you *were*—would it be any business of mine?" Again the ingratiating smile was on the Don's face.

"If I *were*, Don Herman, would you, perhaps, be inclined to *make* it your business?" Boyd pressed the question.

"The Señor Boyd talks in riddles," replied the Don in a tone that was almost gruff. "Besides, I do not believe that the señor is what he might want me to think. We will return to El Presidio."

"In the street Boyd again addressed his companion. "I shall have to leave you while I look after my horse," he remarked.

On the way to the barn his brows were knit in thought. No, the Don was not a man of authority, so far as the law was concerned. But he seemed to have some kind of authority, just the same. So Boyd linked together his facts.

He had found the men together in Descansar. He had not known that they were there when he left Hale's place. He reflected that it also looked as if the Mexican, his white companion, and the Don were associated in some way. That linked the trio, indirectly, with Hale. Somehow, Boyd took but little stock in Hale's statement that the men had merely stopped there overnight as many men of the range were accustomed to do. The boy, Benito, had acted as if the men were not strangers. A queer business, at any rate!

His thoughts reverted to the notices —to one notice in particular. And his eyes sparkled with excitement. He forgot the burning sun, the flies, the dust and greeted the barn man cheerfully.

"Got some food in my saddle pack," he explained. "Guess I'll eat a bite. It's cool in here."

The barn man invited him into his little office in the front of the barn, Boyd having first secured his package of food and his canteen.

"Funny notice up in the post office," he remarked in the course of their casual conversation. "That Frank Gray notice, I mean. I should think that he could get a man around here to take that job, if there's good money in it."

"He's had lots of applicants," said the barn man dryly, "but he turns 'em all down. I think the notice is a fake."

"So?" Boyd lifted his brows wisely. "Where *is* this Bar X Ranch?"

"In the Cordillera Mountains, west of here," was the reply.

Boyd reflected. That would be north of the desert bowl where Hale lived. But how did Gray or his men get down to Descansar? The notice in the post office would indicate that he got his mail there.

"Does Gray come often to town?" he asked. "How does he get here?" That notice is enough to make *any* man curious."

"A road—of a sort—turns into the mountains a few miles north of here," said the barn man. "Gray comes down once in a while, no telling when."

Boyd went on eating as if the information meant little or nothing to him. He started to ask the barn man about Don Hermanùco, but desisted, for he thought that he detected a glimmer of suspicion in the man's eyes. News of his every word and act would fly like magic in that sun-washed town.

"I may have to wait for the stage," he said absently, as he reached for his canteen.

CHAPTER VII.

A MAN ALONE.

AFTER he had finished his meal, Boyd strolled out the rear door and walked casually toward the street, which ran straight between clumps of paloverde, mesquite, and willows. From a slight vantage point, Boyd carefully studied the distant range. The barn man had said there was a road that turned off to the west several miles north of town. But the purple slopes seemed to rise almost sheer in that direction. Doubtless, the road wound around to the south and into the Cordilleras. Boyd could not tell. The purple shrouds that cloaked the mountains veiled their contours.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught a movement in the trees behind him. He turned but saw nothing. Everything seemed still. Then, he walked slowly back along the street, stepped off at a bridge, found a spring where there was an earthern drinking cup, and refreshed himself. But he knew what he had suspected for some time: he was being watched.

Boyd finally sauntered into the cool, dim recesses of El Presidio. He stepped to the right, where he knew there was an open space by the door, while his eyes, relieved of the glare, became accustomed to the comparative darkness within. The pudgy white man behind the bar, who had been surreptitiously dealing out the fiery, contraband tequila, hastily gathered in the small glasses and made an effort to appear unconcerned.

Boyd grinned and strolled over. "If I were a revenue man, old-timer, I'd look *behind* the bar, not on *top* of it," he remarked.

The man managed a sheepish grin. "What will you have, señor?"

"Cigarettes," ordered Boyd, his glance roving about the place.

At the lower end of the bar he glimpsed the Mexican, Matias, whose black eyes flashed back at him. Boyd was struck by a quality in the gaze that he couldn't analyze. It might be defiance, but it hinted more of triumph intermingled with cunning. The change in the man's appearance was remarkable. Whatever the Mexican's worry

or fear or horror might have been, it seemed to have vanished. Nor did he appear in the least worried by Boyd's presence. He was accompanied by his white companion, whose bandaged right hand bore silent witness to Boyd's accurate aim.

Boyd ignored the pair, save for the single searching glance. Don Hermanùco was not there. Boyd turned to the pudgy man behind the bar.

"I suppose there's a place here where a man can put up for a few days, if he wishes?" he inquired. He did not need to look to know that Matias and his companion were listening intently.

"There is a place where one can get a bed, señor, up the street on the other side," replied the servitor respectfully.

Through the medium of a modest mirror on the back bar, Boyd could see covert glances directed at him from many pairs of dark, gleaming eyes. He sensed a strong antagonism, and he was alone. He knew that there was no one upon whom he could depend in an emergency. Suddenly he laughed. The man who was serving the refreshments leaned toward him; there was a startled look in his eyes.

"Did the señor—want anything?" he asked.

"Yes," said Boyd sharply. "I want to see Don Hermanùco—*at once!*"

Every pair of eyes in the place were turned upon him, wide and staring. Matias almost jumped, while his companion's face was a study in open-mouthed amazement. The servitor leaned forward to whisper in Boyd's ear, "Don Herman is taking his siesta, señor."

"Wake him up and bring him here?" Boyd commanded sternly.

"It is not necessary," said Don Hermanùco, appearing suddenly. "You wished to see me, señor?" The Don's earrings glowed like mother-of-pearl against a flame.

"Yes," said Boyd shortly. "Don Herman, what's the matter with this town?" he went on. "Am I welcome here?" He lowered his voice so that it reached the ears of the Don alone. "There need be no mysteries," he added, his own gaze locking with the other's.

The Don appeared to consider this carefully. "I am not sure that there *are* any mysteries, señor," he said at last.

"Why is it that I am followed?" demanded Boyd. "Why is it that those with whom you are evidently intimately acquainted should go through my effects, search my person in the darkness under threat of a knife?"

The Don's eyes glowed like two pin points of black, shot with a green fire. "You must ask elsewhere," he said slowly. His voice had lost its softness. "Have *I* molested you, señor?"

"Do you know Hale?" demanded Boyd bluntly. It was the boldest stroke of all.

The Don's eyes narrowed until they were slits in which the green light burned. "Do you think, señor, that because you are fast with your gun you can bully me with questions?" he demanded.

"I have been pestered ever since I came into this section," said Boyd, ignoring the other's question. "First by that pair down there on a ridge in the hills in the west; again in the night at Hale's place beyond Diablo; again here by you, Don Herman!" Boyd's tone showed that he was in deadly earnest. The sparkle of youth in his eyes had given way to a sinister gleam of anger.

"Señor, you can thank me," the Don said with a cynical smile and a slight bow.

"Yes? And for what?" Boyd inquired.

"Your life, señor." The tone was cold as ice. The Don stepped from the room.

Boyd stood for the space of a minute looking into the shadows at the rear of

the room. No one moved. On Boyd's face was an ominous look—an expression both thoughtful and aggressive. The shadows were deepening fast, signaling the rapid descent of the sun. Finally he laughed without mirth, flashed a look at the motionless pair at the lower end of the bar, turned, and strode out into the street.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIREFLIES.

BOYD crossed the street in the gathering dusk, inquired about a bed and reserved one. He knew that he could not leave town without the facts becoming known very soon; but he wanted, if possible, to get a start on any one who might attempt to prevent his leaving. He did not know, of course, that he would be molested; but he realized that he was suspected of something.

He entered a little restaurant, where he partook of frijoles, tortillas, and tea. His presence drew stealthy looks from the few others in the place. The Mexican girl who served him did so with stoic mien, but her dark eyes glowed with the light of distrust, and Boyd could not shake off the conviction that he was continually under covert observation.

After his meal, Boyd walked to the stable and taking advantage of the barn man's temporary absence, climbed swiftly up into the loft and took up his position near the head of the ladder. It was pitch dark in his hiding place, the only sign of light coming from the hole where the ladder was.

He waited for a time, then heard the man return. The man went into his own room adjoining the stable, and, when he lighted the lamp, Boyd saw gleams of light shining through the cracks of the wooden ceiling. The hay had been cleared from the space at the front of the loft. Boyd noted this with satisfaction, for it would permit him to peer through one of the cracks in the ceiling into the little room below.

He had carefully planned the manner of his escape from town, as it would practically amount to that, he felt sure. To idle about the place and then go to his bed in the rooming house would mean that any move he made during the night would instantly attract attention. So he felt that his best chance of getting a clear start was earlier in the evening.

He pulled off his boots and crawled slowly along the floor of the loft until he was over the lighted room. He stretched out flat, found a crack and put his eye to it. Soon steps were heard in the room below and a Mexican entered and spoke in Spanish.

"Have you seen that gringo stranger?" he inquired.

"No," was the answer. "He was at the door before I went to eat but I guess he went away."

"Which way?"

"I don't know. Maybe he's gone to bed."

The other sneered in derision. "Is his horse here?"

The barn man rose and lighted the lantern. Then Boyd heard the two of them walk back toward the rear of the barn. He scrambled back to the top of the ladder and pulled on his boots. Would they notice that he had placed the bridle on his horse?

Almost immediately, however, he heard them returning, and their voices did not indicate any excitement, except that the Mexican still seemed much worried as to Boyd's whereabouts. As he left, and the barn man returned to his room, Boyd decided that it would be best to get started before any systematic search was begun.

He moved an inch or two at a time to get on the ladder and succeeded in getting down into the stall behind the office without making any noise. Then he stole silently to the rear of the barn and went out. In the shadow he broke

his gun and replaced two empty shells in two of the chambers with cartridges. Then he moved swiftly around the north side of the barn to the front entrance.

The barn man suddenly looked up to see him standing in the door of the room. His eyes showed no surprise and only a mild curiosity. But his gaze was not friendly. In fact, there was a decided gleam of cunning in his eyes that did not escape Boyd.

"Where do you keep your feed?" he asked.

The man seemed on the point of giving him directions, but reached for the lantern instead. Boyd had ascertained that the door to the feed room was secured with a padlock. And this made it necessary for the man to go with him to unlock the door.

Having lighted the lantern, the man led the way to the rear, drew a bunch of keys from a pocket and released the padlock. He stepped inside, and turned to find himself looking into the black bore of Boyd's gun.

He looked thoroughly cowed, for there was that in Boyd's gaze that made him remember what he had heard of the gringo's fearlessness and expertness with his gun.

Boyd stepped to him and felt for a weapon. He found none, although he suspected that the man had a knife concealed somewhere.

"Give me the keys," commanded Boyd in a low, stern voice.

The man obeyed without protest. Then Boyd spoke slowly, coolly, and in deadly earnest.

"I'm not going to cracl. you on the head with this gun, although I'm tempted to do it. But I'm going to lock you in here, and I don't expect you to make any fuss—understand?"

"*Si*, señor," said the man quickly. "I understand."

"I may be around here for some time," said Boyd, "and if you *do* start making a row, I'll do something besides crack you on the head."

Then Boyd took the lantern and backed out, closed the door and snapped the padlock.

He knew the man for a cowardly half-breed and realized that it would be some time before he would have courage enough to make an outcry. Even then, as the room was in the rear of the barn, with many stalls and thick adobe walls between it and the street, it might be some time before he could make himself heard.

Boyd quickly put out the light of the lantern, took down his saddle and saddled the pony. He mounted and rode behind the adobe houses north of the barn to the edge of the growth below the springs. He pushed in among the mesquites and paloverde and made his way to the farther side of the trees and bushes. There the desert lay before him, with the dark hulks of the mountains in the west and north.

Boyd struck up toward the road and, at the moment, the silence was shattered by a sharp report. He caught a flash of red to his right, where the street ended and the road began, as a bullet whined overhead. More flashes and more reports! Hot lead whistled past him as he drove in his spurs. From the street in town came a chorus of shouts.

Then Boyd loosed his gun, and flame streaked from its muzzle as he fired over his left arm. More flashes—this time from the bridge! The bullets sang in his ears.

"The fireflies are out for fair!" he exclaimed, emptying his gun in the direction of the red flashes. As he reloaded, his hat was torn from his head by the impact of a slug of lead.

He pulled up his horse, turned and dashed back, emptying his gun as he did so. He leaned far out and down to the left and caught up his hat, a black shadow on the dimly lighted floor of the desert. There was a flash of silver

from the shadow as he did so. His horse was turning again, in a wide circle. He put his hat securely on his head and spurred his mount toward the road. Then he raced north with shots and shouts ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER IX.

A HORSE IS TRIED.

THE fireflies continued to wink their red gleams in the shadows, while Boyd rode at a ringing gallop for the mountains. His eyes strained ahead. The shadows played from side to side with a familiar swinging motion. Gradually they took form in the starlight, and Boyd saw several riders coming at full gallop. His get-away wasn't going to be such an easy matter, after all. He knew that there were good horses in Descansar, for he had seen some in the barn. Also, he remembered that the mounts of Matias and his two companions had been excellent horses. However, his own pony was fresh, and fast, and eager to go. So he gave the little animal its head, and they seemed fairly to glide over the road—two thin tracks of gray between clumps of greasewood and sage, with the giant saguaros standing back like sentinels.

After he had gone several miles, the riders in the rear saw an attempted move on Boyd's part to turn to the west and met it with a counterstroke. They turned northwest, riding like mad to cut him off. Now it became a test of horseflesh; and Boyd knew another and greater test was coming. For he had abandoned his original idea of getting on the road that lead up into the Cordilleras. It seemed too uncertain.

Suddenly the sharp staccato of pistol shots from the rear, below him, awoke the echoes. He saw the flashes again—the deadly fireflies that winked a red eye with the speeding of each bullet. The deep, dark shadow of the hills seemed to move toward him. The pony was running its best. The wind whistled, and now and then there was a dull, droning sound as a spent bullet began dropping in its flight. Then the shadow ahead rushed upon them, and Boyd made out the first of the low ridges, covered with mesquite and sage.

The flashes from the guns died away as the pursuers leaned forward in their saddles in a desperate burst of speed. But, while Boyd's pony did not possess the speed of the horses ridden by the men in pursuit, the gallant little animal *did* possess certain powers of endurance that were invaluable in such an emergency. Boyd plunged up the slope of the first ridge, rode over the crest, and immediately turned south, riding fast, dodging between the mesquite trees and clumps of greasewood, sage, and soap weed. By the time that his pursuers gained the top of the ridge he was lost in the shadows of the scanty tree growth to southward. His was a bold plan to evade capture, for death stared him in the face.

But the riders from Descansar were familiar with the tricks of fugitives in mountain and desert. A long, searching examination of the slope and crest of the next ridge revealed the fact that their quarry was not making for the high hills. So they split into two parties, one going south and the other heading north.

Boyd caught sight of the group coming south almost as soon as it started. The members had spread out in the wide arroyo between the ridges and were coming at a fast trot. But they hadn't seen him, so he began to look out for cover and to take increased advantage of the mesquites in an effort to screen his movements.

But a wild cry soon floated on the wind, and he knew that his ruse of riding southward had been discovered. He gave the pony the spurs, and they fairly flew along the hard floor of the desert. However, he kept constant vigil on the

pursuit. And now the desert was bathed in the silvery light of the moon, against which the giant cacti raised their arms in grotesque gestures. It was easy to pick a way between the cactus, greasewood and sage. Below him, to the left, Boyd saw the black shadow which he knew to be Descansar. He sped past it on the west. To the right of him the ridges mounted higher and higher, forming a bulwark against the desert. Somewhere in the mountains beyond were the Bar X and Frank Gray, who had boldly advertised for a man who was not afraid to patrol his range. The Bar X was Boyd's objective. About three miles ahead was the steep, lava-rock barrier with its single, treacherous pass—Diablo.

Boyd could hear the faint echoes of the shouts from behind. But the riders were not as close as they had been when he had turned off the road and made for the hills. He cried aloud to the pony in exultation, "We can make it, and we can stand off an army there!"

Slowly the sharp ridge of the lava-rock barrier, dividing the upper desert from the lower, came into view, gleaming, glistening in the moonlight, a welcome sight.

Then the sharp reports of guns broke upon the air. Bullets whistled. Boyd spurred the pony into a last, heart-breaking spurt and made for the lower end of the steep, rocky trail leading up the ridge. As he gained it, bullets spattered and flattened themselves against the hard surface. Then they were going up—the pony slipping, sliding, lunging up the smooth trail.

At the last turn before the final ascent, Boyd heard a hissing cry down the trail. There was a flash in the moonlight close to his face, and the pony leaped up the incline with a snort of pain. The knife that had missed Boyd and struck the horse clattered on the rocky trail.

Boyd whirled with an inarticulate cry of rage. The gun at his hip blazed, and a dark form fell back upon the others. A cry blended with the reverberating roar of the .45.

Boyd's laugh was jarring, grim, mirthless. He heard the cry again. It was the voice of the Don calling the men back.

Boyd returned his weapon to its holster and scrambled up to the crest of Diablo. There the pony waited, a thin trickle of crimson on its right hip showing where the knife had struck. Boyd made a hasty examination and found that the wound was not serious. He drew the pony back where it could not be seen from below. Then he looked down to see the members of the Don's party grouped close together, evidently in conference, while their horses stood idly by. He saw two of the men come back up the trail to where a dark shadow obscured the rocky path. They went back down, carrying the shadow between them. A man rode away with something limp across the front of his saddle.

The men who remained spread out in the form of a fan. Boyd dropped to the rocky floor of Diablo as the air was split by the thundering report of the volley. Lead spattered against the sides of the narrow pass and on the trail below, like rain.

Boyd crept back to where the horse stood. The echoes of the guns died away, and the desert silence closed in. Boyd crawled back to the edge and drew his gun. Its muzzle spat flame six times so fast that the shots blended in a continuous roar in the pass.

A man staggered and went down, while a horse leaped and ran madly away across the moonlit desert. Shouts and fervent curses came up to him out of the confusion. Then there was a stampede for the horses. Men mounted in flying leaps and spurred their mounts in flight. One picked up the form on the ground and threw it over his saddle,

climbed up behind and galloped after the others.

Soon the cavalcade was a moving blot in the shadows of the desert between Diablo and Descansar.

CHAPTER X.

THE BAR X.

BOYD'S thoughts, as he rode along, flew back to the wonder house in the green oasis. Juanita Hale's lustrous, questioning eyes haunted him. In that moment he decided that he would solve the mystery surrounding her. So he pushed grimly on; but there was a glad little ditty of the borderland on his lips.

Dawn found him well into the mountains. Below, in the south, the desert glowed with a saffron tint; off to the west, and a bit south, were the blue-lava hills that formed the rim of the bowl wherein Juanita Hale and her father dwelt. In the east, he could see a purple and pink band across the desert—the knifelike ridge of El Diablo.

Boyd traveled on and came into the upper end of a long valley, on either side of which was a range of mountains. Far down the length of the valley he made out a group of ranch buildings. "I reckon that's the Bar X," he said aloud.

Then he noticed that coming toward him from the upper side of the valley were a number of horsemen. They were riding furiously and gesticulating.

Boyd put the spurs to his horse and dashed straight down the valley. The sharp staccato of shots from the riders accompanied this move.

"Sure an inhospitable country," thought Boyd, frowning and looking at the smoke plumes waving in the morning breeze. He checked his horse, gazing hard at the little cavalcade that was racing to head him off. The shooting ceased.

They look like white men," he muttered. "Sure enough!"

He held in his horse while he made out a tall, well-built white man in the lead. Finally he returned his gun to its holster and brought his horse down to a walk. Soon he found himself surrounded by several men all of whom were evidently cowhands with the possible exception of their leader. This man fondled a gray mustache and surveyed Boyd keenly.

"Nice morning," said Boyd cheerfully, addressing the whole group. "I'm looking for the Cordilleras."

"These are the Cordilleras," said the man with the mustache, nodding at the mountains on either side but not once taking his eyes off Boyd.

"That's lucky," said Boyd. "I'm in the right territory. I'm also looking for the Bar X Ranch."

"You're *on* the Bar X Ranch," was the cool rejoinder.

"That's still better," Boyd observed in a tone of satisfaction. "I want to see Frank Gray."

"Stranger," said the spokesman of the group, "you seem to be plumb full of wants this morning. Maybe you'll tell us how you happen to be here before you ask any more questions."

Boyd's brows lifted. "This ranch has an owner, I take it, and I understand that his name is Frank Gray. I'm here because I came to see that person. I'd like to see him pronto for I'm longer on appetite than on conversation."

"All right, *I'm* Frank Gray," announced the other in a grave voice.

Boyd smiled. "What's your idea in turning down every man who applied for that job you've got posted down in Descansar?" he asked.

"And what business is that of yours?" Gray demanded sharply.

"I came here to apply for the job," Boyd replied dryly.

He noted that significant looks passed among the cowhands, while Frank Gray inspected him at length.

"You don't look much like a cow per-

son in that rig," Gray finally commented after noting Boyd's riding breeches and military boots.

"I understood your notice to say that you wanted a man to patrol your range, not necessarily to work cattle," said Boyd with a scowl. "As for what I happen to have on, I can ride in this outfit. I can see, and think—and shoot."

"Young, too," observed the rancher, as if to himself. "An' a smooth talker."

"My being young and my style of talking doesn't interfere with the accomplishments that I mentioned," Boyd retorted.

"You went to Descansar lookin' for my notice, I suppose," said Gray sarcastically.

"No, I never heard of you or of your notice till I got there," Boyd flashed back. "I didn't go there looking for trouble, either. I went there because it was the nearest town."

He noted that Gray looked at him quickly as he made the remark about trouble.

"You had trouble there?" he asked as though but mildly interested.

"Say, Gray!" Boyd leaned toward the rancher, and his eyes narrowed. "Trouble seems to grow better'n trees or cactus in this country. I took that notice of yours for the goods—the real goods. Do you want a man or do you not?" he demanded.

"I want a man who knows something about the country an' not a tourist," said Gray angrily, while his men snickered. "I can't use *you*. But you can come on to the house an' have breakfast."

"Thanks," said Boyd lightly. "I'll take you up on that. I reckon you're not running any hotel, but, if you could bunk me for a few hours' sleep, I'll be willing to pay full rates."

He wheeled his horse and rode on toward the ranch buildings followed by the scowling owner of the Bar X and his sneering men.

CHAPTER XI.

CROSS-FIRE.

WHEN they reached the courtyard about which were grouped the main house, bunk house, barns and blacksmith shop, Gray dismounted and called to one of the men to take Boyd's horse.

Then the two men entered a long, low room, which was comfortably and pleasantly furnished, although the feminine touch was missing; and Boyd knew at once that Gray was either a bachelor or a widower. As it developed he lived there alone.

A Chinese servant answered Gray's call, and the rancher told Boyd where he could find water and soap and a comb. While Boyd was making himself presentable, he heard Gray speak to a man outside the rear door, and he realized that a report was being made affecting his horse and the contents of the meager pack on his saddle.

"Anything suspicious?" he asked as he and Gray sat down to table.

"It won't get you anywhere to be smart," retorted the rancher. "What I want to know is *how* you came to come here."

"Which is something I've taken great pains to explain," said Boyd, proceeding with his breakfast. "I took that notice down in Descansar to be genuine. So I came up here. I don't believe that you really want a man. But I don't quite get the general idea of the thing. Maybe it's a ruse to get new hands. And maybe it's a sort of a 'defi.' "

"What makes you say that?" Gray asked sharply.

Boyd put down his knife and fork. "Have you really been losing any cattle?" he asked skeptically.

"I've lost two hundred head this spring," replied Gray savagely. "Don't tell me that you didn't know that."

"I didn't," said Boyd. "I only blew in night before last."

"Last night you spent in Descansar?" Gray asked.

"In and out of Descansar," Boyd answered. "Mostly out." He looked at the rancher keenly. "Is that bunch down there friends of yours? I wouldn't want to hurt your feelings exactly, but they don't look good to me."

Gray ignored the question. "You were there night before last?" he inquired.

"Night before last I stopped at the Hale place southwest of here. It was the only spot that looked green enough for water," his guest told him.

Gray's eyes had hardened. "Men don't come from long distances in here lookin' for jobs," he said, at last, in deadly earnest. "I can tell that you've been ridin' a spell. There's nothing north of here for a hand that's wanting work. This is the end of the trail. You'll head back to Descansar. They all do. But I wish that you'd take a message back to that Yaqui Indian who calls himself Don Hermanùco. Just tell him that if he sends another of his long riders up on this range I'll shoot him on sight!" He put down his cup with a crash. "You'll be startin' right after breakfast," he added with a click of his jaws.

Boyd nodded without his customary smile. "Quite an order," he said calmly. "Considering the fact that this fake Don chased me out of town last night after showing me your confounded notice, and that I had to shoot down a couple of men going over Diablo, he'll be real glad to see me and get such a pleasant message. You want me to start right away, you said? Without resting my horse?"

Gray looked at him thoughtfully, then laughed.

"I thought that you were the cleverest hombre that had come along yet, an' I was right. That's why I asked you in here to eat. I wanted to hear what you had to say. But that rig you're wearin' is a dead give-away. Too thin for me, my lad! I'm not even askin' you what your name is."

"Boyd," his guest put in. "Bart Boyd has been my name ever since I can remember. And I haven't had any cause to change it yet."

"No need to, when you're under the protection of that gun-fighting, knife-throwing, double crosser of a Hermanùco!" exclaimed Gray with the trace of a sneer. "Oh, he'll help you to get away—an' take your money for seeing you through after his outfit smuggled you up here—but he'll throw you to the dogs just as quick if it'll serve his purpose. That notice *is* a 'defi'! Tell him I said that, too."

"Bad man, eh?" said Boyd reflectively. "Gun fighter and knife thrower. I thought as much."

Gray rose impatiently. "You can rest your hoss a couple of hours," he growled. "Take a nap in the bunk house if you want. But we're looking for you to be on the move."

He turned on Boyd savagely as the latter kicked back his chair and got quickly to his feet. Words froze on his tongue as he saw the expression on Boyd's face.

"You haven't paid much attention to what I've said," came his cold voice. "I told you that I've ridden fast all night. I don't care what you think I am or where you think I came from; but that horse gets *more* than two hours' rest!"

Gray's jaw dropped for a space. Then his eyes blazed with wrath, and his right hand moved. But it hung at his side as if it had been paralyzed on the instant; for Boyd had drawn his weapon with a movement that could be compared only with a flash of lightning. And Gray stared into the black bore of the gun with a silly, awed expression.

"I don't reckon you'd take a man's

word for anything," said Boyd evenly as the other raised his hands above his head. "But I guess you can believe what you see with your own eyes, and I won't kill my horse for *any* man."

He stepped forward, jerked Gray's gun from its holster and tossed it to the floor just as the thunder of hoofs came from the courtyard and shook the building.

"A raid!" cried Gray, clenching his palms as he lowered them. "An' I fell for the whole business."

Shouts came to their ears, and the Chinese cook came running in with a frightened look on his face. He squealed at the sight of the gun in Boyd's hand and stopped, trembling, when Boyd issued a sharp command.

"You say that that's a raid!" the latter asked Gray.

The rancher's face had purpled in a spasm of futile rage. He made as if he would leap for his gun but stopped at Boyd's next words.

"You think that I came here to arrange things?" Boyd asked with a curling lip. "Get your gun and go out there, Gray, if you think there's going to be trouble." He lowered his weapon.

After a moment of hesitation, Gray leaped catlike for his gun, secured it, took one swift look at Boyd and dashed out the door into the kitchen. Boyd followed, leaving the harmless Chinaman to his own designs.

At the rear door leading into the courtyard he paused with a soft whistle. Several riders were sitting their horses. They were dark skinned, and it required no second glance to see that they were Mexicans and half-breeds of the sort that frequented El Presidio in Descansar. Then Boyd secured a good look at the face of the spokesman and drew back slightly. It was Matias. This was doubtless the party that had gone north looking for him the night before. Don Hermanùco had led a party south and had instructed the other half of his searching party to his lieutenant, for Boyd was now convinced that such was the capacity of Matias.

The Mexican was talking angrily, while Gray roared a reply in Spanish. There were no Bar X men in sight. Boyd stepped out the door and started toward Gray. A yell greeted his appearance, and in another moment the horses were in motion.

Gray leaped back to avoid being beaten to the ground by the flying hoofs, and shots rang out. Boyd threw himself to the ground on one knee as something struck him on the left arm and whirled him half around. He caught a fleeting glimpse of Matia's contorted features, and fired. A rider fell, rolling over and over in the dust of the courtyard. Gray's own gun barked, and Bar X men came running from the barn.

The dust rose in a thick cloud as riders collided. Horses reared, while shots and shouts added their confusion to the thunder of hoofs and the yells of the Bar X punchers. Then the cavalcade disappeared around the front of the house, and the pound of hoofs became fainter as the horses—one of them riderless—fled up the valley.

Boyd rose to confront Gray who was staring at him stupidly, choking in the dust-laden air. He saw Boyd's left arm hanging in a queer way at his side.

"They wanted you!" he exploded. "I reckon they thought they got you!" His final speech was full of puzzled wonder.

Boyd looked down at his left hand. A crimson stream was dripping from his fingers. Then he directed a glance at the fallen rider whom he had shot from the saddle in the confusion. He had intended the bullet for Matias.

"Don Hermanùco's calling cards," he said grimly. "I'm right sorry the Don wasn't along."

"Took us by surprise," said Gray with a black look. "It's the first time they've dared." He looked at Boyd with

fresh interest. "Say, was that part of the outfit you said chased you last night?" he asked.

"That's the half of the entertainment committee from Descansar that I missed," Boyd replied with a scowl. "The Don was with the bunch that followed me south to El Diablo."

Meantime, the men had examined the Mexican lying on the ground. And one of them came up with the information that he was dead.

Gray's gaze centered on Boyd. "Come in the house," he said gruffly. "You're hit, an' I'll have to look you over." The rancher hesitated. "You understand," he began, "that—with things the way they are—a stranger comin' along as you did——"

"Don't mention it," was Boyd's curt reply. "An' I don't think that this amounts to much." He touched his left arm above the elbow.

Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a man turn away hurriedly. He barely glimpsed a bearded chin and the tanned features of a white man. But he caught the flash, too, of a white bandage, and recognized the white man who had been with Matias in Descansar, when the Mexican had attempted to get out his knife. It was the man Boyd had shot in the right hand.

The man dodged into the bunk house, evidently thinking that he hadn't been observed. And Boyd followed Gray into the house with a feeling of growing satisfaction, tempered by anger.

CHAPTER XII.

A MAN TAKES THE TRAIL.

BOYD'S injury turned out to be merely a flesh wound on the inside of his arm. And Gray predicted that it wouldn't bother him after two or three days.

"You better hang around an' take it easy," the rancher advised, "till you're ready to go to work."

"Oh!" exclaimed Boyd. "You're offering me a job, now?"

"Glad to take you on," replied Gray with a wry smile. "I rather like your style of fighting."

"You don't care much who or what I am so long as I'm not under the Don's wing, eh? You're afraid of him?" Boyd inquired.

Gray's face clouded. "Everybody up here's afraid of him," he replied frankly. "Why not? He's got the worst gang of cutthroats north of the border hanging aroun' Descansar ready to do what he tells 'em to do."

"Tell me something more about this Hermanùco," he said.

Gray swore softly. "He's a Yaqui Indian," he declared. "Got some Spanish blood in him, I guess; maybe a little strain of white. That only makes it worse. He was pretty near right when he said that you ought to thank him for your life. He's dangerous. He's reported to be a fugitive from Mexico with a price on his head that's a mile long."

"And Matias?" Boyd questioned.

"Trafficking on the Don's reputation. Mean, treacherous an' dangerous, too," the other told him.

"Don't you think that the pair of them might know something about where your cattle are goin'?" Boyd asked.

"Can't hang it on 'em," said Gray darkly. "They're too smooth. I've lost two hundred head of prime stuff this spring. Reckon whoever gets 'em sneaks 'em off west toward the coast, but I can't catch 'em at it. There's a thousand spot cash in it if you can get results."

"And this man Hale, southwest of here, has he been losing cattle, too?" Boyd inquired.

"I don't know," was the frowning reply. "If he has, he hasn't said anything about it," The frown deepened. And it was plain from his manner that he

and Hale did not have much to do with each other.

"You and Hale on the outs?" Boyd demanded.

"I wouldn't say on the outs exactly. But we'd had range trouble. He thinks that I hog it. *He* doesn't use the southwest range where I put some of my cattle, so why shouldn't *I* use it?"

Boyd rose with a smile. He hadn't forgotten that Matias and his white companion—the man whom Boyd had shot and who now was on the Bar X—had stopped at Hale's place that first night. And they had previously halted Boyd on what must be the southwest range. Now they seemed to be linked with Hermanùco and the desperadoes of Descansar.

"I reckon my job is cut out for me," said Boyd. "But the first thing that I want is some sleep. You needn't say that I'm hired yet. An' if I could lie down somewhere out of sight for a few hours, it would be best."

"Upstairs," replied Gray, leading him to a small room that overlooked the courtyard. "I'll tell 'em that you're wounded an' that I've put you to bed," added the rancher as he was about to leave.

"One thing more, Gray," said Boyd in a casual tone. "I believe I noticed that one of your men had his right hand bandaged. Has there been some other trouble?"

"Came in with that yesterday afternoon," replied Gray. "Fell from his horse while in the timber lookin' for strays," he went on. "Name's Morgan. No, we ain't had no shootin' scraps this spring."

Boyd thanked the man as he went out. Then he sat on the bed thinking. Morgan! It was a name that he must remember. But the last thing he did remember as he fell asleep was the wistful look in Juanita Hale's eyes.

When he awoke, it was nearly six o'clock.

"I've sent every one down on the range except my barn man an' the man that's hurt," said the rancher, as Boyd met him in the courtyard. "How do you feel?"

"So, so," replied Boyd with a shrug. "Not bad at all. But I couldn't do a very good job of saddling, and I'd like to have my horse ready in case anything should come up."

"You mean you want to ride tonight?" asked Gray, astonished.

"Can't tell," replied Boyd enigmatically; "might have to. Listen, Gray, are you hiring me to look around here? That thousand sounds good to me, and there's another reason why I wouldn't mind running down this rustling outfit; but I've got to go at it my own way. So I'd like to have my horse saddled and cached somewhere."

"I'll attend to it myself," Gray put in. "Your hoss'll be in the last stall on the left in the barn. All you've got to do is tighten the cinch, but I expect to be notified of any new move you decide to make."

"If there's time," Boyd assured him with a smile.

After supper Boyd went up to his room while Gray went out. He did not light a lamp but sat at the window watching the shadows gather over the courtyard with the deepening of the twilight. But the first time he wondered, uneasily, what would happen if Hermanùco took a notion to descend on the ranch and demand that he be given up.

Finally, he quietly left his room and walked out into the night. He cautiously moved around the outside of the house in the shadows to the front. He could see the large barn off to the right. And he was looking at the dark doorway of the barn when he caught a flash of white. He saw the small white object moving in the space below the barn where there was a horse corral, and suddenly its significance stirred him. Morgan was down there. And it was

the white bandage about his right hand that he saw.

When the white disappeared, he stole silently to the side of the barn and around to the rear. He saw a shadow and the white object moving behind the corrals and bunk house toward the willows along the stream.

It was not hard to deduce that Morgan had slipped down from his horse and now planned to leave the ranch by way of the stream flowing down the slope from the timber.

He hurried into the barn, spoke softly, and the low whinny of his horse came from a rear stall. He went into the stall and found the horse saddled as Gray had promised. He tightened the cinch strap, unhooked the halter rope, and led the pony out as noiselessly as possible.

He could no longer see the telltale badge of white that Morgan was wearing, but he surmised that the man had gone up the stream for there was no sign of him near the corrals or behind the buildings. He climbed into the saddle and struck up the slope in pursuit, keeping well in the shadow of the trees and willows.

When he reached the edge of the timber he stopped and listened. From the other side of the little stream came the dull echo of hoofbeats. He pushed through the willows and saw the shadow of a horse and rider hastening up the valley just below the edge of the timber.

Whereupon, he hitched his gun into position for quick action and started after Morgan.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SINISTER SHADOW.

AFTER a time Morgan left the regular trail and turned off into the south, following, as Boyd surmised, the same long-curving ridge by which the latter had first entered the country.

The desert bowl was now almost directly below him on the left, and his heart leaped as he saw the horseman turn down from the ridge and head directly for the entrance to the retreat of the Hale's. He checked his horse and watched as Morgan rode down the long slope of the ridge, rounded the high point of rocks above the oasis and galloped in through the entrance.

Boyd remained inactive for several minutes, but he was thinking steadily. Here appeared to be another link between the Don and his Descansar gang, the Bar X and the Hale place. Could Hale have some definite connection with Hermanùco and the actual rustling? It was a startling thought, but it would explain that wistful look in Juanita Hale's eyes.

Boyd growled to himself and began the descent of the ridge, He approached the barn warily. When he reached a spot where he could see in the rear door, he caught the gleam of a lantern. Benito, the Hale's Mexican boy, was evidently attending to the horses in the barn.

"Benito," Boyd called softly.

The lantern ceased to move as the boy stood motionless in the center of the barn.

"Here, Benito," Boyd called a little louder.

The boy hurried to the door, his eyes widening as he recognized his unexpected visitor.

"Señor!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "You have returned!"

"Yes," replied Boyd, "and I want to ask you a question. Who is here, Benito?"

The boy glanced quickly behind him, and Boyd saw the shadow of fear in his eyes.

"You must go, señor," he said breathlessly. "It ees not good for the Americano to be here to-night."

"And why not, Benito?" Boyd demanded almost gruffly. "Where is the man who just rode in here?"

But the boy evidently had no intention of betraying Morgan's presence, if the man was there as Boyd supposed.

"You must go, señor," he implored. "The Americano should not be here to-night. The señorita would worry."

The last was spoken in a tone of confidence, and Boyd felt a subtle thrill. Juanita, then, must have spoken of him to the boy.

"Come!" he said in a tone of pretended exasperation. "Why do you speak of the señorita, and why is it dangerous for me to be here to-night?"

The boy made a gesture of helplessness. "Come," he whispered, taking Boyd by his good arm.

They went around the corner of the barn, and Benito led the way through the shrubbery under the trees to a point near the little adobe where Boyd had been previously attacked.

"You wait," the boy told him, putting a finger on his lips as a sign of caution. "You wait till I come." Then he slipped away noiselessly in the direction of the wavering light that filtered through the branches of the trees from the house.

Boyd waited minute after minute, growing more and more impatient and uneasy. The place seemed unnaturally still. There was only the faint gurgle of water from the spring to be heard, and the occasional stamp of a horse's hoof in the barn.

Suddenly a flash of white appeared within his range of vision. And in a moment, the boy and Juanita Hale were standing before him in the little opening among the trees. He saw the girl's white, oval face close to him, her dark eyes regarding him in a startled gaze, the masses of her hair forming a shadowy halo about her head.

The boy stole silently away at a word in Spanish from his mistress.

Boyd jerked off his hat. "Señorita, I did not mean to annoy you like this," he said earnestly, unable to take his eyes from her upturned face. "I *followed* a man here," he continued.

"Oh! Not so loud!" A look akin to terror came into her eyes.

Boyd was astonished. "Is there danger, señorita?" he whispered tremulously. "Are you or your father menaced in some way? What can I do? Tell me."

"It is *you* who are in danger," she protested. "You must go away. You must go at once. Will you promise me?"

"I am employed near here now," he hastened to say; "on the Bar X, señorita. I am working for Gray. I followed a man here from the ranch to-night. I have come to find out why he should come here. Is he here now, Miss Juanita?"

Her agitation became intense. "You must not ask," she whispered. "You must not stay. You must go, señor; you must go pronto! You will promise me?"

Suddenly a door opened and closed, and there were footfalls on the rear steps of the house. Peering through the trees, Boyd caught the white flash of Morgan's bandage as the man strode rapidly down the yard toward the barn. Boyd pushed through the trees with the girl striving to hold him back. Then her efforts suddenly ceased, and he looked around to find that she was gone.

He stepped out from the shadows of the trees, looking after Morgan. Then his gaze shifted to the windows of the house. He stiffened and stared at a large window which was aglow with yellow lamplight. There was a shadow at the window—a clear-cut shadow against the light within. Boyd put on his hat quickly and pressed his lips tightly.

"She said there was no one there—no one here," he muttered to himself grimly.

He continued to stare at the window, opening and closing his hand above the

butt of his holstered gun. The shadow might have been a person, it was so easily distinguishable. It stood out complete in every detail. The massive head and shoulders, harsh lines of the profile, the dangling earrings—all were faithfully and accurately reproduced in striking silhouette.

It was the shadow of the Yaqui cross-breed who called himself Don Hermanùco!

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE DARK.

BOYD struck through the trees and hurried to the west gate. There he passed through and awaited the coming of Morgan in the shadows. Morgan rode to the gate, passed through and closed it. The lantern beams had vanished. Boyd caught a rein, and the horse reared as Morgan cursed and looked down to see the starlight glinting on the barrel of Boyd's gun.

When Morgan saw who it was that had accosted him, his eyes widened and he stared at Boyd incredulously.

"Get down," Boyd commanded curtly in a guarded tone.

Morgan obeyed and stood uneasily, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"Where'd you come from?" asked Boyd, scowling in the man's face.

"Descansar," Morgan lied. "I'm on my way west."

Boyd smiled secretly. So Morgan was sure that he had not been seen on the ranch. It was a bit of information that Boyd had wanted. He wished to threaten the man, mislead him and, at the same time, give him sufficient assurance so that he would be sure to carry out any plans with which he might be concerned. Also, if Morgan were going to see Matias or any others of the Don's band who might be near, he would be certain to reveal the fact that he, Boyd, was at Hale's. This would bring them there and would be in keeping with Boyd's plan to test John Hale and Juanita. The Don himself could wait. He could see that Morgan, puzzled as he was, was trying to think rapidly.

"I suppose you left Don Herman well?" Boyd suggested.

Morgan bared his teeth in an evil grin. "I didn't see him, when I left," he answered with a smirk and a look backward toward the yard on the other side of the gate.

"All right. Climb on that horse an' start west, an' keep going west," said Boyd in threatening tones. "If I see you again I'll shoot you on sight! I haven't forgotten your part in that affair in town."

The business end of Boyd's six-gun swung upward, and Morgan mounted hastily. Boyd pointed toward the western rim of the desert bowl, and Morgan spurred his horse in that direction. Boyd figured that he would keep riding westward until he was well out of sight before he would make his wide detour to the entrance of the bowl and the real start for his destination. This would give Boyd time to get to his horse on the point and prepare to follow him.

He reached a point on the west side of the house where he could see a light in a window which he took to be one of those in the living room. He paused in the shadows to listen. The hoofbeats to westward had died away. He would have to work fast. He stepped forward, and two bands of steel seemed to close about him, binding his arms against his chest.

The suddenness of the attack took him so completely by surprise that he was lifted bodily and carried farther back into the shadows before he thought of resisting. He gathered his muscles and wrenched his shoulders in a powerful effort to free himself. But the arms held him as if in a vise.

He kicked strenuously and drew a curse in Spanish. But he had not needed the sound of the voice to know that he

was in the grasp of Don Hermanùco. He realized swiftly that his first appraisal of the man's physical strength had been correct.

The Don's left arm came up under Boyd's chin, choking him mercilessly. But he kicked again with all his might, and the hold loosened. Boyd felt his feet on the ground and wrenched himself out of his antagonist's grasp, striking blindly with his right. His left arm, still in the sling and stinging with pain, was useless. He leaped backward and fell through a small mesquite. In another moment, he was on his feet and running into the open yard as a shaft of light shot unexpectedly across his path.

He heard the Don rushing upon him, and his gun leaped into his good hand. The Don stopped, his face contorted in a grimace of rage, the white teeth showing against lips drawn back. Boyd was almost taken aback by the ferocity of the look. But the expression faded as a voice came to their ears.

"What is it?" It was John Hale's voice, and a side glance disclosed the man coming down the rear steps with a lamp in his hand. Behind him the white vision of Juanita showed against the yellow light shining through the doorway.

"Pardon!" ejaculated the Don. "It is the Señor Boyd!" He spoke in trailing, silken accents. "I thought that it was some prowler, Señor Hale." He laughed in metallic cadence.

Boyd put up his gun with a dark frown. It now was too late to hope to overtake Morgan.

"Mr. Boyd!" Hale exclaimed sharply.

Boyd made a deprecating gesture. "I met Don Herman in the path," he said, watching Hermanùco closely. "We were shaking hands."

"Señor Boyd is now living in the Cordilleras, and he has come to visit us. I should have told you before, father," Juanita interrupted.

Boyd was thunderstruck. He saw a defiant sparkle in the girl's eyes. Also, he thought that he caught a message of warning in them. His own narrowed as he heard Don Herman's laugh.

"Will the Señor Boyd come in?" the Don asked with a bow.

Juanita's laugh rippled on the still air. "Don Herman *would* extend hospitality in another's house," she said in cutting accents. "But *I* am mistress here, señor. Will you come in?"

Boyd, astounded and perplexed, nevertheless realized that the girl was trying to protect him.

He saw Hale scowl and turn to speak to the girl, whose eyes blazed defiance at him. It was Hermanùco's jarring, derisive laugh that decided him. He pushed past Hale, and with Juanita mounted the steps. As they went in, he turned swiftly and saw the Don glaring at John Hale who stood white-faced, holding the lamp and staring after them with a worried expression.

CHAPTER XV.

THE INSULT.

THE señor calls rather late," said the Don, when they were settled in the living room. "But then the señor is young and knows no better."

Boyd was enraged at the insult.

"You wish to continue our quarrel?" he demanded.

John Hale gazed at him in frightened astonishment and shot a despairing look at the girl.

"If you cannot control yourself, Don Herman, you can go!" cried Juanita.

"Juanita!" exclaimed Hale. "You forget that Don Herman is also a guest."

"It is of no matter," said Hermanùco. "Señor Boyd and I have met before. We are accustomed to playing with words."

"As I remember it, we have not dealt altogether in words," replied Boyd coldly.

"A brave speech before *la* señorita," the Don hinted pointedly.

"You wish me to repeat it somewhere else?" Boyd flashed.

Juanita stepped quickly between them. "For shame, Don Herman!" she cried. "This is not flattering to one of your accomplishments."

"Juanita, leave the room!" her father ordered.

"Señor Boyd is injured," she returned, and Boyd saw that she was tormented almost beyond endurance with fear.

"It is not necessary," said Hermanùco evenly. "Perhaps the señor's visit is over."

Boyd saw with surprise that Hale was looking at him imploringly. Did he want him to go? Did he realize that such a move would doubtless result in another clash with Hermanùco, more than likely a clash with weapons?

"It is you who should go, Don Herman!" cried Juanita in a scornful voice, touching Boyd's injured arm. "You know that the señor cannot leave in safety!"

"Juanita!" It was a despairing cry from the lips of Hale.

"I take it we both better go, Hermanùco!" Boyd suggested.

The half-caste's eyes flamed with red fire as he bowed before the challenge. He whirled on John Hale and ordered him out of the way in Spanish. Then he stepped quickly to the door and stood aside for Boyd to pass through before him.

"No—*no!*" pleaded the girl, clinging to Boyd. "You must not go."

Boyd put her gently aside and looked at Hale who was cowering in the background. Hale's eyes were on Hermanùco, and when Boyd glanced again at the Don he saw that the swarthy face was white; the thick lips appeared thin, so tightly were they pressed. And in the eye was the unmistakable look of the killer.

"You first, Hermanùco," he said coldly, pointing to the door.

Without a word the Don strode swiftly through, followed by Boyd. Juanita ran after them as they walked through the dining room into the kitchen. The Don threw open the door and put his great sombrero on his head. Boyd had no inkling as to where the half-caste kept his gun.

The Don stepped out on the porch. As Boyd prepared to follow, Juanita threw her arms about his neck.

"Don't go, señor," she begged. "Don't go—for *our* sake!"

He looked down into her eyes in astonishment. "But I suggested it," he said, instinctively putting his free arm about her. "I cannot refuse to go now. I am not afraid, Juanita."

"No, you must not go," she whispered. "For *my* sake, señor."

Don Hermanùco, standing on the porch, suddenly laughed jeeringly. "We will not always deal in words, Señor Boyd," he sneered. Then he turned down the steps.

Juanita clung to Boyd as he tried to start after the half-caste. In a moment she released him, ran to the door and closed it. Then, she stood with her back against it, her head held high, her eyes looking defiantly into his.

"You must stay, señor. He is gone," she said.

John Hale came forward, his face dark with anger. He grasped Juanita and started to push her aside from the closed door, but Boyd prevented him.

"Señorita Hale has asked me to stay —for *her* sake," he remarked coolly.

"You are a blundering, irresponsible fool!" shouted Hale.

Then to Boyd's surprise the man sank down in a chair and bowed his head in his hands while Juanita put her arms about him and looked up at Boyd out of eyes brimming with misery.

Boyd hurried back to the living room for his hat. When he returned Juanita

was still bending over her father. Boyd bit his lip, hesitated, then threw open the door.

Instantly there came the sharp report of a .45. The hat was jerked from his head, and the glass in a window jangled as the bullet sped on. From the very yard itself came the swift pound of hoofs.

Hale looked up fiercely. "You can go now," he said with a sneering inflection, "in safety."

"Which is exactly why I choose to stay," Boyd retorted, picking up his hat and looking at the bullet hole in its crown.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEW ANGLES.

WITH the shot and the sound of hoofs betokening the departure of Don Hermanùco, a quick change seemed to come over Juanita. She rose and stepped away from her father.

"Why don't you tell Señor Boyd, father?" she asked wearily.

"Tell?" Hale cried getting to his feet. "Tell what?"

Tell him why it is so dangerous for him to stay around here," she replied firmly.

"If he can't figure that out for himself let the fool stay and get shot full of holes!" stormed Hale, looking darkly at Boyd. "What're you doing back here, anyway?"

"I'm working near here, Mr. Hale. Working for Frank Gray of the Bar X," Boyd explained as he saw Hale start and then stare incredulously at him. "Is that so strange?" he continued. "Gray wanted a man for special work, and I took the job. You seem to have a queer lot of friends, Mr. Hale."

"Queer lot? Queer, eh! Well, let me tell *you* something, young fellow: some of the people around here are mighty dangerous. Having a job won't protect you—a job with Gray won't, anyway."

"That's plain to be seen," remarked Boyd dryly. "But did it ever occur to you that I might be able to protect myself?"

"Huh?" Hale sneered openly. "You just the same as invited death by crossing the Don to-night."

"I know," Boyd said with a nod. "But he's a fake Don, a fugitive, a thief and a killer—and you take his part! Why?"

Hale seemed aghast at the audacity of his visitor. But the girl looked at Boyd in approval.

"Every word that he speaks is the truth, father," she remarked quietly.

"What business is it of yours?" Hale demanded angrily.

Boyd felt his hold upon himself slipping. "Hermanùco seems to be making my business his," he answered. "A gang of his attacked me at the ranch, and I got this." He touched his wounded arm. "And another thing, Mr. Hale, Frank Gray has hired me to find out who it is that's rustling his cattle."

It was a bold stroke and it told on Hale, for he looked at Boyd with fresh interest. Then his anger appeared to leave him. He grew suddenly limp.

"But Hermanùco's attitude here," said Boyd, pursuing the subject. "It looked to me as if he were bullying you and your daughter, too."

Hale sighed wearily, but his frown returned. "I live in this quiet, green spot because I have been at peace here," he said slowly. "My daughter goes away for half of the year, starting when the heat gets too bad. She'll be going soon, now.

"It was really the heat that my wife wanted," he continued as if to himself. "It agreed with her here. I have a limited herd and manage to get along. But I have to keep on good terms with——" He broke off and glared at Boyd.

"There's no reason why I should be telling you all this," he said harshly.

"But there is!" cried Juanita eagerly.

"Can't you see, father, that Señor Boyd would be our friend."

"Our friend? Our friend?" Hale's voice was hoarse with emotion. "I have no friends, do you hear? I have no friends!"

"It might be to your mutual advantage if you and Gray could be friends," Boyd shrewdly suggested.

"Gray?" Hale looked at him vacantly as if it were a new thought. "I never did anything to him even though he *does* want to hog all the range."

"Have *you* been losing any cattle?" Boyd inquired, changing the subject.

"No," replied Hale. "I haven't so many of 'em that I can't keep track of 'em."

"Being a stockman, I don't suppose you're in favor of rustling," Boyd persisted. "I suppose I could depend upon you if necessary."

Hale seemed bewildered. "You? Depend upon me? I don't know you or anything about you, or what you're doing. You're working for Gray. Then work for him. His ranch is north of here in the hills. I advise you to get back there; better yet, I advise you to get out of the desert of El Diablo!"

He strode angrily toward the living room, and Boyd turned to the door with a grim smile. As Hale entered the other room, Boyd opened the door and went out, Juanita following him.

The oasis was bathed in the soft light of the moon which had risen in the east. It was very still.

"I'm sorry, señor," the girl said in a low voice. "You see? It is as I said. It would be better for you to go away from El Diablo," she continued earnestly. "I cannot tell you much. I do not know much. The Don is treacherous and powerful. Father says that it is not wise to cross him. So sometimes the Don's friends stop here on their way back and forth across the western mountains. We can't help it."

Boyd unhesitatingly put his arm about her. "You warned me to-night, Juanita," he said softly, "and I thank you. But when I was going out with the Don you asked me to stay for your sake. Is there anything that I can do for you?"

She remained motionless, looking up toward the sea of stars in the velvet, night sky. He stared fascinated by her delicate profile. Then she turned her eyes down to his.

"Yes," she whispered. "You are brave and able. You should leave the desert of El Diablo, perhaps. It would be safe for you. If you do not go you will have to kill Don Hermanùco and —*I hope that you do not go!*"

The last words reached his ears in a fierce whisper. For a moment he felt her arms about his neck. Then she had eluded his grasp, and the door opened and shut, leaving behind it a beautiful memory.

Boyd slipped down the steps into the shadows with a soft exclamation of wonder.

"She wants me to kill Hermanùco!" he whispered to himself.

He walked quickly to the barn. It was dark, and there was no sign of the boy, Benito. Boyd decided there would be nothing to learn from the lad if he woke him. So he went on behind the barn and spring and climbed the fence.

Then he struck off toward the point and the clump of trees where he had left his horse.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE RANGE.

BOYD, having secured his horse, pushed on up the ridge to a steep slope leading to the crest of the first range below the Cordilleras. Junipers were thick on this slope, and he had to give all his attention to his pony. Twice he dismounted and climbed afoot where the side of the ridge seemed particu-

larly steep. When he finally gained the crest of the range he stopped to rest.

To the left of the direction in which he had to proceed to reach the Bar X Ranch, he saw a long valley not unlike the one in which was situated the ranch proper. He could see the length of this valley in the moonlight, and his attention was arrested by sight of a herd of cattle bedded down on the west slope, midway the valley's length. There were moving figures there, too—moving shadows that he recognized at first glance.

"Riders," he muttered. "But they're not working cattle at night!"

He leaned forward in the saddle and, after a time, gave vent to a low whistle. The cattle were getting up! He turned his pony down the ridge and descended in the shelter of the piñons. The herd was up, and the riders, seven in number, were moving back and forth among the cattle. He reached a point just above the herd and there reined in his horse to watch the operations.

He could see the riders plainly but could not make out their faces because of the shadows cast by the broad brims of their hats. Once, however, he caught the remembered flash of white and realized that Morgan was there. One horse in particular attracted his attention—a fine, big horse, ridden by a large man. He watched this horse, which finally came out of the herd on the upper side. Then Boyd involuntarily spoke aloud and struck his horse with the spurs in surprise, for it was Don Hermanùco who rode the big horse.

Boyd's pony, hearing his voice and feeling the jab of the spurs, plunged out of the screen of junipers and in full view of the men below. There were two sharp whistles, and in another moment the riders were emerging from the herd.

Boyd swore softly and turned his horse about. And, in that instant, the stillness of the night was shattered by the reports of guns. Bullets whistled over his head. He drove in his spurs and dashed up the valley at the edge of the scanty timber. From behind came the pounding of hoofs and more shots and a voice roaring above the tumult.

Hermanùco and his men were in hot pursuit. Boyd had already learned that his pony was not the match in point of speed of the horses owned by the Don and his men. To outrun his pursuers would be a sheer impossibility, just as it had been that night when he had raced for the protection of El Diablo. But there was no such refuge as El Diablo this night, so he must resort to tricks.

Therefore, with this idea in mind he suddenly turned and cut directly across the narrow valley. Guns blazed behind him, but his ruse succeeded, for he gained the shelter of the timber on the opposite slope. Here he struck boldly up the ridge. It was in climbing that the little horse showed its powers of endurance. And Boyd took advantage of every bit of cover. He could hear his pursuers on either side of him and behind, but he gained the top of the high ridge and swung into the east.

Although the pursuit continued, the shooting suddenly subsided. Boyd looked behind and could make out only six riders. He looked in vain for the big horse bearing Don Hermanùco. The Don had evidently turned off. But the remaining six were closing in on Boyd. He held his reins in his injured hand, and, jerking out his gun, sent two shots whistling among his pursuers. A horse shied, collided with another. There followed a general mix-up in which the party was split and the gap between it and Boyd widened.

Boyd spurted. There was a gleam of light at the ranch house, showing that his shots had aroused some one. The fugitive bore down upon it in a last desperate burst of speed while his pursuers once more loosed their guns in a futile volley of scattered shots. Boyd

turned in the saddle to reply to the firing, but saw that the six riders had given up the chase and were galloping for the shelter of the timber up the slope.

He rode on into the courtyard to find Gray standing near the kitchen door holding a lighted lantern. The cook and barn man were hurrying from the bunk house.

Boyd turned his horse over to the barn man and entered the house with Gray. In the living room Boyd dropped wearily into a chair and told Gray what had happened.

"They must have chased my men off the range down there," said Gray in a serious voice. "I reckon my hiring you has brought things to a show-down."

"Maybe so," said Boyd dryly; "but it had to come some time. Listen, Gray, you have other men besides those that were with those cattle. You better send word to 'em and get 'em started down there. You better go with 'em," he added as an afterthought.

"And you?" Gray asked.

"Me? I'm going to get a couple of hours' rest, then start for Descansar to see what they are doing there. You can bet on one thing, Gray, now that Hermanùco has started, he'll finish."

"You think that you might meet Hermanùco?" the rancher queried.

"I—might," said Boyd grimly. He hadn't told Gray of Juanita Hale's last words.

"You're not afraid of him?" said Gray pursuing the subject skeptically.

"Not while I can see his hands," Boyd replied.

"I'll send the wrangler to tell the men an' go with you!" exclaimed Gray in swift decision.

"It isn't necessary," said Boyd coldly.

"Then I'll look out for the other end!" cried Gray. "I'll go to Hale's!"

"No!" snapped Boyd. "You——" He paused as he saw the fire in the rancher's eyes, for it was plain that Gray intended going to one place or the other. He evidently considered it enough to send word to his men to protect the west range. Thoroughly aroused, he was determined to deal with the principals. But to let him go to Hale's——

"All right," said Boyd with a scowl, "send your man on his way and we'll start for Descansar. I slept all day and I'm good for a while yet. I suppose I can use one of your horses?"

"I'll have one saddled," Gray flung over his shoulder as he went out.

Boyd sat looking at the lamp on the table without seeing it. Instead he saw Juanita Hale's pale, oval face with the big, wistful eyes and the crown of bronze-gold hair.

"If you do not go, you will have to kill Don Hermanùco, and I hope you do not go," he repeated to himself.

He drew his gun and broke it. One by one he inspected the cartridges. He spun the cylinder and replaced them thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CAPTURE AND AN ESCAPE.

THE two men rode away from the ranch house before dawn. Gray had sent word by the wrangler for all Bar X men to meet in the valley in the west range where Hermanùco, Morgan and the others had been inspecting the beef herd. Boyd and Gray had concluded that the men who had chased Boyd to the house would not remain in the timber but would proceed to Descansar or some other rendezvous.

The rancher's face was frozen in grim lines. Boyd's discovery of Hermanùco on the Bar X Range had been the one thing that he needed to connect the false Don with the rustling activities on the ranch. It was as if all the trouble and uncertainty he had experienced thus far had crystalized into a cold, implacable fury. Boyd was con-

vinced that Gray would have gone to Descansar on his own initiative had he not unwillingly told him of his proposed expedition.

Gray had voluntarily spurned the idea of Hale's being connected with the rustling.

"But tell me why you and Hale are not on any too friendly terms?" Boyd had asked.

"It's a matter of range," Gray had replied gruffly. "I've spread out my stock pretty well, I guess. But he wasn't using the range. He only runs a couple hundred head an' he don't need a quarter of the range he has down there. Funny, but he seems to be doing mighty well on that number of cattle."

It had set Boyd to thinking. And he was thinking now as they rode up the valley in the dark hour before dawn. Hale *had* done pretty well. It had cost a great deal to live as he did. Boyd remembered Hermanùco's domineering attitude toward Hale; his patronizing of the girl. He ground his teeth. And she had asked him to do a thing which would put his life in the direst danger. Why? Because it would free her and her father? It was the only logical solution at which Boyd could arrive.

The first gray streamers of dawn were in the east as they galloped across the floor of the desert. Descansar squatted like a brown toad among the cacti and greasewood and mesquites. They saw no sign of life as they reached the trees by the spring and halted in the natural screen afforded by the verdure.

"I don't know where Hermanùco lives," Gray confessed with a frown. "These adobes all look the same to me."

"I'll go on afoot to the barn and bring the half-breed back from there," Boyd volunteered. "He'll know. We don't want to ride in and wake the town."

Gray agreed to this with the understanding that he would be waiting just within the trees to come at a moment's notice if there should be trouble.

Boyd dismounted and crept down below the springs. It was not yet full dawn, and the town appeared asleep. Possibly the Don was not there, nor any of the others. But Boyd believed that, if any further move had been contemplated for that night, the Don would have attacked the Bar X Ranch house. He knew it was impossible for Gray to obtain help and he could take his time in pushing his schemes. There was no doubt in Boyd's mind but that Hermanùco intended to make off with Gray's beeves. And, since he had been defied at Hale's by Juanita, he might be expected to consider that he need no longer respect Hale's enforced friendship. He might even attempt to carry off Juanita!

The startling thought spurred Boyd on. He left the shadow of the trees and ran to the rear of the livery barn. All was still, save for the occasional movement of the horses, as Boyd entered. He stopped and looked knowingly about. Every stall contained a horse. And he had also seen some horses in a corral below the barn. This made it plain that a goodly number of Hermanùco's followers were in town.

Boyd slipped stealthily to the little room in the front of the barn. As he reached it, he heard the half-breed barn man moving within. He peered through the open door, saw the man with his back turned toward him, and stepped inside the room.

The half-breed turned quickly to find himself looking into the black bore of Boyd's gun. Slowly his eyes traveled to Boyd's face, and he drew back with a look of terror. Boyd motioned to him to precede him and they left the room, walked the length of the barn and out the rear way. From there they crossed into the trees and, in a few minutes, Boyd had rejoined Gray with his prisoner.

"They're all here, from the number of horses I saw," Boyd said to Gray in a

low voice. "We've got to work fast and sure so as not to get them all up at once. "Remember," he cautioned; "I want Hermanùco alive if possible."

"They'll pay the rewards on him dead," muttered Gray.

"It isn't altogether a matter of rewards," said Boyd, remembering the Don's attitude toward Juanita. "I'd like to have the satisfaction of handing him over." He ceased speaking and listened.

Curses in Spanish came from the barn. Some one was looking for the barn man. Boyd turned on the prisoner.

"Where does Don Hermanùco live?" he demanded fiercely.

"Up—at the end," stammered the man in a fright.

"Get up," commanded Boyd, pointing to his horse.

The man scrambled up into Boyd's saddle and Boyd mounted behind him.

"Show us the way," he ordered. "Around behind the buildings."

The man pointed to the right, and they rode around the springs and along behind the squat adobes until they reached one almost at the end of the street, where the road stretched away to the southwest, past the ridge of El Diablo. Here they dismounted, and the trembling half-breed pulled a bell rope in the low adobe wall that inclosed the rear of the house.

From within the patio came a dull clangor. The hands of both Boyd and Gray dropped to their guns. They kept their eyes on the little door set in the wall before which the barn man swayed uneasily.

"You want to see the Don," Boyd reminded him, pressing the muzzle of his gun against the other's side for an instant.

"*Si*, señor," came the reply.

Soon a voice was heard, and Boyd and Gray stepped aside as a small panel opened in the center of the door. The half-breed gave the word and, as the door swung back slowly, Boyd pushed the barn man ahead and entered with Gray bringing up the rear.

They saw an old Mexican woman, a grotesque figure with a mass of gray hair above her pinched, brown features. She cried out in astonishment when she saw Boyd and Gray. But the half-breed, recovering some of his composure now that he was near one who he thought could protect him, spoke to her sharply.

She led the way along a narrow, uncovered passage into a small patio and they heard the gate click shut behind them. They moved toward a door the old woman indicated but, before they could reach it, it swung open and Don Hermanùco stood before them. His eyes widened, and Boyd and Gray both knew that the Don had not suspected the presence of any one in his own home.

Boyd leaped forward, covering the Don with his weapon. Gray was at his side as he drove the half-caste back into the room. The Don's eyes were glittering red beads, and his lips sneered. Nevertheless, he held up his hands so they were on a level with the broad brim of his big sombrero.

"Keep him covered," Boyd told Gray as he stepped to the Don and, standing to one side, carefully felt of his person. He removed a gun from a holster under the half-caste's left arm. He felt the man's sleeves and boots and clothing but could find no knife.

Hermanùco said nothing during the process, but his eyes roved wickedly from one face to the other.

"You were meddling with my cattle last night," Gray began in a low, angry voice. "You had 'em all ready to trail, eh?"

The Don's eyes glittered, and he bared his teeth in a hard smile.

"Let that go, Gray," said Boyd. "Find a piece of rope, or tear up something from that bed so that we can tie

him." He stood back, keeping the Don covered.

"I guess rustling is the least thing you're wanted for, Hermanùco," he said. "We're going to take you where we can find out all the details.

Gray had found a small coil of rope with which he advanced toward the captive. The Don stepped back, and Boyd caught the significance of the move just too late. The white light of day suddenly pierced the semigloom of the room. Hermanùco's right hand tipped his sombrero. Boyd dropped just as a shot rang out from the window which had been stripped of its curtain from the outside. There was a flash of steel over his head and he heard Gray cry out.

Hermanùco leaped toward the door. Boyd swung on his heels and fired but the Don had reached the door. In a flash he fired twice at the window, and the shadow there disappeared.

"The half-breed spread the alarm!" cried Boyd, running for the door.

Gray followed him, holding his gun in his left hand, his face deathly white. As they came into the patio a gun roared ahead of them, and they turned into the door on the right. They found themselves in a narrow hall with a door at the end. And the door was locked.

Boyd stopped and listened. A sound came from the other side of one of the partitions of the hall. Boyd backed against the opposite wall and hurled himself against the flimsy partition. He went through the cloth and paper and fell into the aperture that he had made with a crash. Gray's gun roared behind him as a Mexican came into the hall. Then the rancher followed him.

They hurried to the one door out of the room, opened it cautiously and passed out into a small garden behind the house. From the street came shouts and the scuffle of feet. The town was coming to life. Boyd noticed some adobe bricks piled at the rear of the garden next to the wall. He made for them and went over the wall in a flying leap. Gray came more slowly. He staggered as they made their way to their horses.

The sounds of tumult increased as they mounted. Several men came running around the house as they drove in their spurs and, with Boyd, in the lead, dashed for the road leading to the knifelike ridge and the pass of El Diablo.

CHAPTER XIX.

DESERT MADNESS.

AS they rode, Boyd saw that Gray's face was ashen and that he kept his left hand to his neck. He could see a trickle of red on Gray's fingers.

"How bad?" he called to the rancher. "Can you make it?"

Gray nodded and moved his lips, but Boyd did not catch his spoken reply.

He looked back but could see no horsemen on the trail behind them. As they raced on toward Diablo he continued to look back, but no dust clouds indicated that pursuit was in progress. He frowned and wondered. It wasn't like the Don not to attempt to take them or shoot them down.

"Will these horses make it over Diablo?" Boyd called to Gray.

Once more Gray nodded without speaking, although he tried to smile.

They reached the foot of the trail to El Diablo and started up. The big horses had evidently been that way before and the steep, rocky trail failed to stop them. They reached the top more quickly and easily than Boyd had been able to do with his pony.

No signs of pursuit were visible from the pass, and Boyd turned to an examination of Gray's wound. It was a knife thrust well to the left side of the neck. Boyd wet his handkerchief with water from the one canteen they carried and bandaged the wound.

"Saw it comin' an' couldn't dodge,"

explained Gray. "Afraid of a knife. It paralyzed me. First time I'd had one thrown at me."

Boyd took a last, long look in the direction of Descansar. He saw nothing. His uneasiness increased. Why wasn't the Don on the move? And then the significance of Hermanùco's delay was brought home. He was making his preparations carefully, taking time to assemble such property as he wished to take with him and giving his men the same opportunity. He was gathering his forces for the last coup in that section and leaving Descansar forever!

When they reached the floor of the desert on the west side of Diablo, Boyd saw that the burning air was affecting Gray. This was plain from the man's pallor and his labored breathing. Perspiration stood out on his forehead in great beads. So Boyd suggested that they head toward Hale's place in the bowl at the upper end of the stretch of desert.

"It's the nearest place to water," he pointed out. "You and Hale can be civil to each other in this emergency, I hope. Besides—I want to warn Hale," he added.

"Warn Hale?" asked Gray in a listless voice.

"It's the first place that Hermanùco will hit for," Boyd explained with earnest conviction."

He bit his lip in vexation. He could have shot the half-caste down in his own door; he could have given him a chance to draw and defend himself—treatment which he had not always accorded his victims. Rewards! Boyd snorted and glared at the smoky outline of the knifelike ridge behind them. A murmur of thanks from Juanita would be enough!

Gray demurred at going to Hale's but finally rode willingly enough. The sun beat down upon them and the heat seemed to rebound from the dry, hard-baked floor of the desert. Boyd's left arm had so far healed that he had taken it from the sling. Halfway the length of the upper desert, Gray slumped in the saddle and retained his balance by holding to the horn. Boyd, watching him closely, saw this and called to him sharply. Gray looked at him vacantly and began to mumble. Then Boyd realized that it was going to be a problem to get the rancher to Hale's.

He rode in close and talked to Gray, but the latter did not appear to hear him. He was crying out now in spells of delirium. Boyd knew that it was not lack of water but the swift fever of the desert that had him in its formidable power. He rode closer and soon after, Gray checked his horse and looked wildly about.

"Two hundred head!" he shouted. "I knew that crooked greaser was behind it all." His voice trailed off into a meaningless mumble and he pitched from the saddle.

Boyd caught him and eased his fall. Then, after several unsuccessful attempts, he got Gray into the saddle in front of him. They started on, Gray's own mount following.

Finally, Gray began to fight and claw with the unreasonable strength of a maniac. He had his gun in his hand before Boyd realized what he was doing and emptied the chambers with lightning rapidity, nearly shooting the horse in the head. Boyd struck his wrist with the barrel of his own gun and thus caused him to drop the weapon. It struck the horse on a fetlock, and the animal reared, nearly throwing its double burden. This action wrenched Gray's neck and Boyd saw fresh blood on the disarranged bandages.

He held Gray firmly about the shoulders in a grasp of steel and struggled with him as they sped on. But the horse had developed a limp from the blow of the heavy .45. So their speed was cut down to a rapid walk. The

horse instinctively turned toward the red rocks with the faint scent of water. Boyd was himself nearly spent as they went in through the rocks and headed for the oasis. Gray raved and shouted in wild delirium, and his yells brought John Hale running to the gate as they reached it.

The man's face was a ridiculous study in perplexity, incredulity and amazement as Boyd rode in with his senseless burden.

"Is that adobe I slept in one night vacant?" Boyd asked crisply.

Hale nodded, and Boyd rode on with his man into the yard before the small adobe he had used on the occasion of his first visit there.

He called to Hale for help and the latter aided him in lowering his burden. They carried Gray inside. Benito came hurrying to the door, and Boyd ordered him to bring some cold water. Hale stared in frightened fascination at the crimson-stained bandage. He looked at Boyd suspiciously and questioningly.

"Listen, Hale," said Boyd slowly; "there's another souvenir of our friend of last night." He touched the bandage meaningly. "We went to Descansar to get Hermanùco this morning, and failed. I found him in a herd of Gray's cattle last night, and Gray insisted on going with me this morning. The knife that hit Gray was meant for me. Now, Hermanùco is getting his crowd together down there to make some kind of a big start."

"He's coming here?" asked Hale in a hoarse voice. *"Here?"*

Boyd was startled by the man's tone and manner. A wild look of terror was in his eyes. The hand that he placed on Boyd's arm shook.

"He saw us start in this direction," said Boyd. "I had Gray on my hands and this was the nearest water——"

He stopped as Hale drew back with a queer, sucking intake of breath. The man seemed to tremble in every nerve and muscle. Then he turned and plunged out of the door.

CHAPTER XX.

HALE'S SECRET.

HALE followed the Mexican boy to the adobe, wiping huge beads of perspiration from his forehead as he went.

"Our horses," he directed Benito, as the boy put the water on the table. "Juanita's horse and mine, yes, and yours," he added. "And one to pack." He paused, staring at Boyd as if in deep thought. Benito stood just outside the door, his eyes wide with surprise.

"Fill canteens!" shouted Hale, waving him away to do as he was bidden. "Pronto, Benito!"

There was a movement on the bed.

"I tell you he took two hundred head!" screamed Gray, sitting bolt upright. "I know it, but I've got to prove it. Maybe I can prove it. He took two hundred head! Drove 'em off! Drove 'em off!"

Boyd flung himself upon the raving rancher as he started wildly to get up. Hale stepped to aid, but his hands trembled and his face was white as death. He was of no assistance to Boyd and, seeing that he was in the way, drew back and stood clasping and unclasping his hands. His whole manner was that of a man in the throes of a terrible fear.

Gray's struggles subsided as the fit of delirium passed. Boyd wrapped the injured man's head in a cool, wet towel.

"He's better," he said, stepping away from the bed. Those spells and the fever were caused by the exertion and heat. He may not have any more of them. It's merely reaction. I think that he's going to sleep."

"You believe what he said?" asked Hale huskily.

"Why not?" asked Boyd curtly.

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Hale. "I tell you that I had nothing to do with it.

The Don was behind that rustling up there, same as he was behind everything else." The words died away, and a frightened look came into the speaker's face. He looked at Boyd sharply, as if he regretted saying so much.

"Exactly, go on!" said Boyd with a nod. "But you knew how Gray's cattle were being rustled, didn't you?" He did not tell Hale that Gray had not been accusing him in his delirium but had really been referring to Hermanùco.

"I always thought that Gray suspected *me,*" said Hale bitterly, "but I couldn't say a thing. My hands were tied. The Don will kill me. That's certain—absolutely sure. I knew it last night. If it were not for Juanita——" He buried his face in his hands.

"That's just it," said Boyd gently. "If it were not for Juanita!"

"I wanted to protect her and make her a lady," Hale explained.

"You didn't have to *make* her a lady," said Boyd. "So you became a partner of Hermanùco's? It was money for Juanita's schooling and travel you needed?"

"I suppose I was a partner," muttered Hale. "Maybe I was. But somehow I never thought of it in that way. Maybe I didn't look at things right. I winked at things. The men he smuggled out of Mexico and across the west hills—but I never took any blood money!"

"But the money you *did* take," Boyd suggested with a faint note of scorn; "the money for anything!"

"It was always paid for cattle!" cried Hale, getting up and wringing his hands. "For my cattle. Hermanùco bought stock of me and paid *good* prices. *I* always had a good market when others *didn't* have it. It saved me—that sure market for my stock."

"Just a nice way of bribing you," Boyd pointed out disdainfully.

"I sent Juanita out each year," mumbled Hale. "Sent her to school. Bought pretty things for her. It didn't take as much money as you think. And Hermanùco *would* come here. There was no keeping him away. I was afraid of him as was everybody else."

"But in return for the big money for your stock, Hale?" Boyd persisted. His eyes held the other's in a cool, hard gaze.

"There were mysterious crossings of the pass of El Diablo," said Hale in a low, tremulous voice. "Men went back and forth and stopped here. I put them up. This is an isolated spot, as you see. It takes a wonderful horse to cross El Diablo."

"Hermanùco used this as a halfway house in his smuggling of fugitives, eh?" asked Boyd sharply. "Used this as a sort of second and emergency headquarters, huh? Probably managed his rustling operations from here?"

"I don't know anything about that," cried Hale. "I only know I had to keep right with him for the sake of——"

"Don't say it!" Boyd broke in with contempt in his voice. He recalled a certain look in the Don's eyes. It was the look of a ruthless, merciless killer; the look of a man who would go white with fury at being crossed even in minor things; the mirror of a mind that moved in a single, straight track toward the thing it wanted. And if Hermanùco wanted Juanita——

Boyd turned away from the girl's father with an anxious, worried expression. "What are you going to do?" he demanded harshly, whirling on Hale.

"Do? Oh, yes." Hale came to life with the old fear driving his harassed thoughts. "I'm going to take Juanita and go!"

There was a step in the doorway and the girl, looking fresh and beautiful in a white frock, stood before them.

"Go where, father?" she asked in her soft voice.

Hale was momentarily taken aback. "Go get what you want to take together," he finally said. "Make a small

pack that we can carry on a horse. We're leaving home!" he cried sternly.

"Leaving *home?*" She turned her questioning eyes on Boyd.

"There has been trouble," Boyd explained as gently as he could. "The Don is gathering his forces. He will probably come here first and your father thinks that it is best for you to go while there is time."

Before he had finished speaking, Juanita's eyes were flashing.

"Run away?" she cried angrily. "Run from that beast because——" She paused, apparently noticing the still form of Gray on the bed for the first time. "He is hurt?" she faltered.

Boyd nodded. "We were in Descansar this morning and met Hermanùco," he said with a slight shrug.

"You went to Descansar?" Her eyes widened with comprehension. "You went to see *him?*" she asked in a whisper.

"And made a mess of it," said Boyd lightly. The look in the girl's eyes thrilled him. He forgot everything under their bewitching spell.

They heard the stamp of horses in the lower yard. Hale started and his breath came sharply through his teeth. Boyd's gun was out on the instant, and he leaped out the door followed by Juanita.

But it proved to be Benito, leading out the saddled horses.

"The horses are ready!" exclaimed Hale in a pleading voice.

"Take them back, Benito!" cried the girl, stamping her foot. "Put them in the barn." She turned on her father who was standing with his hands at his sides and a helpless look on his worn face.

"I will not go," she declared in a ringing voice.

Hale studied her a few moments. Then his fear and anxiety seemed to fall from him as a coat would fall from his shoulders. He smiled at Juanita. "Bring me my gun!" he told her. "We will stay."

Juanita threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, although Boyd noticed that her face had gone white.

She ran toward the house while John Hale stood staring after her, muttering something to himself.

Benito came up to Boyd with a puzzled expression on his boyish, brown face.

"Keep the horses ready in the barn," Boyd told him. "And keep close watch, *amigo mio.*"

The boy nodded eagerly. He turned to go, hesitated, then hissed softly in Boyd's ear. "The señor will protect Juanita for she love heem." Then he hurried away.

With the boy's words fairly ringing in his ears despite the fact that they had been so softly spoken, Boyd looked at the grave face of John Hale and wondered if he had heard.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FLIGHT.

BOYD looked at the still form of Gray. "If he'll only pull out of it when he wakes," he muttered to himself. Then he addressed Hale. "Suppose we send a message to the Bar X men by Benito."

"Good," said Hale. "I'll call him."

He went to the door and called the boy as Juanita came up bringing his gun belt with its heavy weapon in the holster.

"Your father is right when he says Hermanùco will be here with a force of men," Boyd told her. "Our best plan is to take to the hills and make our way to Gray's place. If Gray can't ride I'll have to take him on the horse with me. Meanwhile, I'm going to send Benito to the northwest range to tell the Bar X men to start for the ranch house. We can't wait here for them because Hermanùco is liable to arrive any time.

We should meet the Bar X men on the trail in the north. Then we can decide if we want to come back here or go on to Gray's house. It's as strong as a fort," he added, thinking of the thick, stone walls of the Bar X Ranch house.

"I'll go to the house and prepare some food and get some things ready to take with me," Juanita practically remarked. She smiled encouragingly at her father who had buckled on his gun.

Hale and the girl went on to the house as Boyd turned back into the adobe. He found Gray awake.

"What'd I have—a touch of heat?" the rancher asked in a complaining voice.

Boyd told him what had happened in as few words as possible and suggested that he remain quiet. At this juncture, Hale came in, and the greeting between the two was, to Boyd's satisfaction, natural enough. Hale provided Gray with another gun to replace the weapon that had been lost during Boyd's struggle to get the rancher across the desert from El Diablo.

The sun was at the zenith as they prepared to start for the hills. As they rode away, Juanita and her father looked back; and Boyd read in their eyes the conviction that their home would be destroyed. Juanita, however, smiled at him bravely as they left the oasis behind and headed through the entrance to the desert bowl.

They rode straight for the foothills in the north. Soon Boyd saw the thin, blue outlines of the knifelike ridge reaching across the desert like a veil. But he saw, too, a spiral of smoke lifting into the glassy sky from the pass of El Diablo. It was a signal. A signal to Hermanùco in Descansar, or a signal to him somewhere in the higher hills? Boyd could not know which was the case. But they pushed on a little faster.

The sun had buried itself in a sea of crimson behind the western hills, and the shades of twilight were deepening as they came at last into the worn trail leading to the ranch. They saw no sign of the Bar X men, but remained to rest for a time. When they came into the head of the valley where the ranch house was located the great arch of the sky was alive with stars. Boyd looked at Gray's face in the cold light and saw that the man was under a terrific strain. His face was drawn, and his cheeks and eyes were unnaturally red. But he held to the saddle horn and tried to smile reassuringly.

Far down the valley the dark shadows of the ranch buildings were to be seen. So they headed straight down the valley. Where were the Bar X men, Boyd wondered! Had Benito been waylaid? Surely he must have reached the valley on the northwest range hours before.

Gray was riding ahead, sitting straight in the saddle, when disaster occurred. The rancher suddenly collapsed, toppled to one side and fell from his seat, his horse shying. But he fell clear of the stirrups, and Boyd had dismounted and was bending over him in a twinkling.

Juanita dismounted and went to Boyd's side with a canteen of water.

"Fainted dead away," said Boyd. "To much for him."

The girl bathed Gray's temples with the water. But Gray did not revive. Boyd spoke softly to Hale, "Get down and help me. We'll have to get Gray in my saddle. Hurry—we've got to get going. It may not be our crowd."

The two of them lifted the unconscious form of the rancher into Boyd's saddle as the dull echoes of hoofbeats became more and more distinct. Boyd mounted quickly behind Gray and held him as they started on down the valley.

They had hardly got under way when riders burst from the timber at the upper end of the valley on the east side and came racing in their direction. Boyd and the others spurred their horses and fled toward the dark shadow

of the buildings. But yells and shouts punctured the stillness of the night, and bullets whined in the air. Hale answered the shots with his own weapon, firing as best he could over his shoulder.

Boyd, since he was holding the unconscious rancher, had no chance to reply to the firing. He tried to count the men in the party but was unable to do so because of the confused shadows as they rode close together. But it was larger than any group of the Don's men that he had seen. Hermanùco had doubtless come straight to the ranch from Descansar. For the time, at least, the Hale place was safe.

As they raced for the ranch buildings, Boyd saw another set of moving shadows just beyond the barn, coming up the valley at a great rate of speed.

A bullet clipped his right stirrup. He drove in his spurs for a final spurt with Juanita riding beside him and Hale bringing up the rear. And now there were red spurts of flame from the shadowy cluster of houses, barns and outbuildings. Looking back, Boyd saw one of the pursuers pitch from his horse and the others spread out, checking their furious pace. Then the attacking party broke in half and began to ride in a wide circle about the buildings.

Boyd and the others dashed into the dim courtyard in safety. They heard the strong, young voice of Benito shouting, and the boy came running for Juanita's horse. Men were racing about in the courtyard and some took the horses of Boyd and Hale. A single light gleamed in the sheltered recess at the rear door. Boyd and Hale, carrying Gray, hastened toward this and found the cook standing there with a lantern. He proceeded them into the house, holding the light.

They deposited Gray on the divan in the living room, and the cook pulled the curtains close over the windows.

"I'll look after him," Juanita announced in a firm voice.

"Stay here," Boyd told John Hale. "And put that light out at the first sign of trouble anywhere near.

He ran through the kitchen and out into the courtyard as there came a fresh roar of guns. Then he literally stumbled into the midst of rearing, plunging horses, spurts of flame, a bedlam of pounding hoofs, hoarse yells and barking guns. Then for a moment in the light of the stars he caught sight of the brutal features, thick lips and cruel eyes of Hermanùco.

He fired as the form vanished in a cloud of dust that rose like a black curtain from under the hoofs of the milling horses.

"Get the Don!" he shouted at the top of his voice, as he dropped in the shadow along the side of the house while bullets crashed against the wall over his head and splintered lead rained down upon him.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CAPTURE.

IT seemed to Boyd that the world literally turned inside out during the next few minutes. As he lay in the protecting shadow, with the storm of bullets raining down upon him, he realized that the attackers had swung in, massed and were attacking in full force.

It was a bold stroke and a cunning one, but just such an unexpected move as might be expected from Hermanùco. The Bar X men, who had just arrived at the ranch, had not had time to organize sufficiently to repel such an attack. And it was now a question of every man for himself.

These thoughts flashed through Boyd's mind as he dodged along the shadow toward the front of the house. The dust, rising in clouds, obscured the light of the stars and made it impossible to shoot with any precision. However, the Bar X men had one advantage in that they were afoot while their

enemies were mounted. It would be extremely dangerous for Hermanùco or any of his men to risk losing their horses by dismounting.

The Bar X men had taken refuge in the doorways of the barn and bunk house. From these vantage points and around the corner of the house, they poured lead at the invaders. Horses leaped and plunged, while some went down. Riders were thrown in collisions and others, shot in their saddles, fell and were dragged. Men were shooting everywhere—at random, it seemed. But Boyd held his fire in the hope that he might again see Hermanùco.

Suddenly he saw a shadow to his right, creeping upon the low stoop at the rear door. He jumped upon it. "White man, white man!" was shrilled in his ear. He threw the man over and got a look at his face. He felt his prisoner tugging at his weapon, so he brought the heavy barrel of his gun down upon the man's head with stunning force.

"Morgan!" he exclaimed.

He turned back and again dropped to one knee as a bunch of horses tore past. He added his own six shots to the volley that sped after the remaining riders, now fleeing from the courtyard.

"The horses!" he shouted, running toward the barn in the stifling dust and acrid gunpowder smoke. "It's Boyd. Let's get after them."

But the men were running to favorable vantage points outside the courtyard for the final shots from carbines and six shooters, and his voice was drowned in the tumult. Riderless horses still dashed out of the courtyard. Others milled and reared in the open space between house and barn. And then the last shots died away, the horses became still, and an unnatural quiet settled down upon the scene.

Hurrying around the lower end of the house, Boyd saw the attackers spreading out in a wide circle. Because the horsemen were flitting shadows, moving in and out, he was unable to count them accurately; but he saw that there were twice as many out there as there were Bar X men gathered about the house.

He turned back to the courtyard where he heard groans. There were horses down, too, others standing, and still others circling outside the cluster of buildings with their reins dangling. He started for the rear of the house. Bar X men called to him to halt, and he spoke his name. He ordered them to get lanterns and move the wounded men into the bunk house.

"And watch out for the second attack," he warned.

When he reached the rear of the house he found the cook there with the lamp. Morgan was lying unconscious. Boyd picked him up and carried him inside. The light was not burning in the living room but the cook followed him with the lamp. As Boyd entered with his burden he saw John Hale and his daughter crouched in front of the divan where Gray lay. Both had guns in readiness. Juanita had taken Gray's weapon.

"They've beat it, for the time being, anyway," said Boyd as he put his burden down on the floor. He looked closely at Morgan and saw crimson stains on his head.

"Wash him up and douse him with water," he told the cook. Then he lighted the living-room lamp. "Got one alive, anyway," he said to Juanita and her father. "There's a lot of them hurt."

He saw that Gray's eyes were open and realized that the rancher was looking at him questioningly. "You went out all of a sudden," he told him. "They rode right in after us and our men were all afoot. They just started shooting at every one on a horse and beat 'em off. They left some behind." He turned to Hale. "Keep that fellow here till I

get back," he ordered. He motioned toward the still form of Morgan.

"Was *he* with them?" asked Hale, breathing hard.

"Sure," said Boyd; "and Hermanùco, too. I caught just one glimpse of him. Maybe somebody got him. That might be why they ran. I'm going out to find out."

Lanterns were moving about the courtyard when he went outside. He crossed to the bunk house where lights also were burning and stopped short at the sight which met his eyes inside the door.

Groaning men, most of them Mexicans or half-breeds, some twisting their features in pain, others lying grimly resigned, occupied nearly half the bunks. Some lay so still that Boyd knew that they would never again be concerned with a raid. Two more were carried in and a Bar X man told him that that was all. But neither was the man whom he sought.

When he stepped back into the living room he found that Morgan had revived. He nodded to the others and sat down near him. He spoke in a cold tone: "Morgan, you cried 'white man' out there and, so far as I know, you're the only white man that's been working hand in glove with Hermanùco. Now I'm going to give you a chance to talk like a white man. You'll get just the one chance. If you don't want to talk you don't have to. I'll just turn you over to the boys outside, and you can imagine what they'll do to you when they learn that you were a traitor to the outfit."

Morgan's face was pale. "What do you want to know?" he demanded gruffly.

"We want to know Hermanùco's plan, that's all," replied Boyd.

"He wants to clean out the ranch!" Morgan blurted, wincing with pain as he touched his head. "Put me any place but out there," he added with a whine.

"Who's with him?' Boyd demanded.

"Matias an' the whole gang," the other told him surlily.

"And the cattle down below?" Boyd prompted.

"He was going after them next," Morgan confessed. "That is some of us—of them—were. I guess he figured on going down to Hale's place." For a moment he strained his neck and looked keenly at John Hale and his daughter.

Boyd's eyes blazed with a steel-blue light for a moment. "What became of the two hundred head of Bar X stock that were stolen this spring?" he asked sternly.

"They were drove north to Orlando," replied Morgan slowly. "How do I know you won't turn me out to that crowd afterward?" he whimpered.

"I'd turn you out in a second if I thought that you were not telling the truth," snapped Boyd.

Gray swore softly and glared at the man who had worked for him and betrayed him.

"How many men has Hermanùco got?" Boyd pursued the inquiry.

Morgan thought for a minute. "Started out with thirty some," he answered finally.

Boyd rose and looked about. "Tie him up or lock him up somewhere in the house," he directed the cook and Hale, pointing to Morgan.

Juanita was sitting with her hand on Gray's forehead. The rancher's eyes were closed. Boyd started to speak to the girl as Hale and the cook left the room with their burden. But his speech was silenced by the sharp report of a gun in the courtyard. After that came a chorus of shouts.

Boyd stepped to the table and blew out the light, then flung back a window curtain. He stepped aside with a sharp exclamation. A ruddy glow filled the expanse of the window and was reflected in the room. A tongue of flame

seemed to leap straight into the air across the courtyard. Boyd started out on the run.

The bunk house was on fire!

CHAPTER XXIII.

FIRE AND LEAD.

BOYD burst into the courtyard and saw that the whole space between the buildings was lit by the glare of the fire. The bunk house, built of logs, with a wooden roof, was blazing as though it were of tinder. The dry grass and weeds behind it were burning, too, and there was fire in the rear of the barn.

A fusilade of shots greeted Boyd's ears. Through the gap between the bunk house and the barn he saw the flying shadows of horses. Bar X men were firing at the riders who had not attempted to enter the courtyard.

Boyd ran toward the bunk house. Wounded men who could walk or crawl were emerging from the doomed structure. Two Bar X men were carrying others out. Boyd swore under his breath. It was in keeping with a man like Hermanùco to do a thing like this —fire the bunk house and sacrifice his own followers to further his ends.

"We got the rat that did it!" cried one of the Bar X men as Boyd turned from the bunk house to the barn.

The circling riders were racing their horses about the cluster of ranch buildings, their guns spitting fire. They had an advantage because the glare of the flames made it almost impossible for the Bar X men to see outside the lighted space. Boyd hurried back to the front of the house. It was already intolerably hot in the courtyard. The flames from the burning bunk house cast a livid glare that made the world without seem a black, inky void, despite the stars and the moon which were mounting into the night sky above the eastern peaks of the Cordilleras.

Although Boyd found it hard to estimate the number of riders, it persistently occurred to him that the number did not seem as great as when the Don's forces had withdrawn after the first attack. Did Hermanùco have a portion of his force somewhere in reserve? Boyd knew that the Don was aware of Juanita's presence. And that explained why none of them had been hit by the bullets of the Don's followers. Hermanùco must certainly have instructed them to shoot wide and high, lest they hit the girl.

Boyd ground his teeth and stole along the outside of the house, away from the fire. The shooting continued in sharp staccato above the roar of the flames, cries from the wounded, and the shouts of the Bar X men. When Boyd reached the rear of the house he ran to the shelter of the timber along the stream. Gleams from the fire traced flaming patterns among the cottonwood and willows. He pushed on across the stream. The foliage extended almost to the rear of the bunk house.

As Boyd emerged on the farther side he caught the swift movement of a shadow above him. He whirled and saw, for an instant, a dark form creeping through the trees the way he had come. Upstream he glimpsed other shadows. He dashed back through the foliage just as a man emerged and ran to the rear of the house.

Boyd stole after him and crept around the corner of the house away from the courtyard in the direction that the man had taken. He saw him disappearing at the front corner of the house and ran swiftly in the shadow next to the wall. As he rounded the corner cautiously a movement close to the wall arrested him. Then, almost in his face, came a blinding glare and the report of the gun thundered in his ears.

He struck sideways with the barrel of his weapon and felt it hit against the man's face. Before he could draw it

back to fire at close quarters a hand gripped his wrist. He tried to strike out with his left but felt a sickening twinge of pain, since his left arm was practically useless from his former injury.

They locked in a one-sided struggle. Boyd held the gun in his right hand in a grip of iron, pushed back against his antagonist with all his strength, and brought up his right knee into the man's midriff. There was a grunt of pain and an oath in Spanish. Then Boyd recognized his assailant and fought with renewed fury.

With a mighty effort he wrenched his right arm free. The flicker of a flying ember lighted for a moment a cruel face with a livid scar and lips curled against white teeth. Murder was expressed in Matias' face. Above the Mexican's head there was an instant's glow. It was a freakish flare of the fire on his knife.

Boyd dropped, the gun in his hand streamed red death, and Matias' hand came down. The knife clattered on a rock at his feet. Slowly he braced himself back against the wall with the reflection of the flames and sparks in the sky lighting his twisted features. Then he crumpled and lay in a heap at Boyd's feet.

From somewhere above the fire on the farther side of the house came a volley of shots. Then came the voice of Clavis the Bar X foreman, shouting above the turmoil! Boyd leaped toward the courtyard. A blast of heat as if from a furnace door met him. He shielded his face and eyes with his left arm. The bunk house was a roaring mass of flames—a great ball of fire. Sparks soared upward in clouds. At the rear of the house he saw the dark forms of men. He caught a glimpse of John Hale's white head. Then the shooting started afresh, both from the rear of the house and from the direction of the barn. Hermanùco was attacking from both sides, with men afoot and others mounted.

As Boyd held his left arm against his neck and face, he ran the length of the house with the flames roaring to the left of him. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he caught a glimpse of a white, oval face and staring, frightened eyes as he passed a window. Hale and two others backed into the recess at the rear door as he reached them. One of the men went down. Hale was reloading his gun.

Boyd suddenly saw a big, coarse, brutal face—caught the gleam of the fire in Hermanùco's earrings; saw the sneer on the thick lips, the darting red of the killer's eyes.

Then a wall of fire seemed to come between them as a puff of wind drove the flames down into the courtyard. There was a white vision at Boyd's side.

"Juanita!" he cried. "Go back!"

He grasped her about the shoulders and drew her quickly through the door into the kitchen. Hale and two others came stumbling in, choking from the breath of flame and smoke that had swept in upon them. Figures swarmed in the recess outside the door, while Hale and the others turned and emptied their guns from just within the door. There were shouts and groans, and then the recess was clear save for huddled forms on the ground.

Juanita had stepped to the window, drawing Boyd with her. The cracking of guns came from below the barn, and shouts and yells, The fierce roar of the fire drowned these sounds as the wind died. And then Juanita and Boyd saw a strange sight.

In the courtyard, his immense figure outlined against the glare of the flames, stood Hermanùco alone. He stood motionless, his gun in his hand, looking this way and that, and occasionally passing a forearm over his forehead. The huge sombrero was gone. His coat was partly burned and hanging in charred

remnants where he had put out the fire with his hands. On his face was a horrible expression. He looked like a demon with reason gone; insane with rage and hate.

Boyd started out. Juanita ran after him and clung to him.

"No!" she panted in his ear. "Let him go; he is done. He wants to kill. You can see it in his eyes."

They were at the door. John Hale had pushed past them. The girl screamed as her father stepped out of the recess. A sharp report came to them on the instant, and Hale staggered back, shooting aimlessly. Juanita all but caught him as he fell. Then she saw a dark form framed for a moment in the opening to the recess. There was a step behind her. She held her breath.

An unnatural laugh came from the lips of Hermanùco in the opening. She shuddered and turned away; looked up to see Boyd's steel-blue gaze locked with that of the half-caste's.

"Drop that gun!" Boyd commanded. "Drop it!"

Hermanùco's eyes went red; and his gun seemed to tip upward the barest fraction as the place rocked to the roar of Boyd's weapon. Hermanùco stepped back. Smoke drifted upward from the muzzle of his .45. He tried to raise it, but dropped it suddenly. He went to his knees and fell forward upon his face as a great shower of sparks rained above him.

Juanita dropped upon her father's breast with a choking sob as Boyd put up his gun.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

WITH the death of Hermanùco those who still remained at the rear of the house fled into the timber along the stream and quickly mounted their horses. Word was carried to the riders below the barn, and the remaining members of the Don's band rode off down the valley for a conference.

Boyd shouted instructions to Clavis to have the Bar X men get their horses ready to give chase. When the Mexicans saw the Bar X riders bearing down upon them with cowboy yells and flaming guns, they scattered in all directions. Boyd left the punchers to pursue the fleeing members of Hermanùco's broken band and rode back to the ranch house.

In the living room he found Juanita attending her father who had received Hermanùco's bullet in the right side. She told Boyd that it might not prove serious and that she was sending Benito south for the doctor in the morning.

Gray had been taken to his bedroom where he was being looked after by the cook. The exertion of riding to the ranch, and the subsequent excitement, had again brought on the fever and delirium. Boyd himself felt worn and weary; but he went outside to keep an eye on the fire until the Bar X men should return.

They returned shortly, with Clavis, the foreman, in the lead, bringing four more prisoners. Then Boyd, explaining how matters stood, put Clavis in complete charge with instructions to watch the fire, attend to the wounded, remove the bodies of Hermanùco and the others, and attend to the horses.

Boyd went in and helped move John Hale to a room upstairs. Juanita said that she would lie down beside her father to get a little rest and to be where she could watch over him. Before Boyd left the room she came up to him, her dark eyes welling with a grateful, tender light of pride. He smiled down upon her, and she suddenly put her arms about his neck and kissed him. Then drawing back with flushed cheeks she ordered him out of the room.

In another room Boyd threw himself wearily on a bed.

It was a week afterward when they moved John Hale from the Bar X Ranch to his own home in the little, green oasis in the desert bowl. Boyd had gone down there to stay the day after the big raid on the ranch and found that the Hale house had not been molested. Benito had gone for the doctor, who made Hale comfortable and predicted an early recovery from his wound. Gray had mended speedily. He came with Juanita and her father when they journeyed home.

That evening there was a meeting in the Hale home at which John Hale and Frank Gray agreed to coöperate in the stock business in that district. With the rustling band broken up and its members leaderless and in jail or scattered they knew not where, the two men felt that they could conduct a profitable business. Boyd insisted upon paying Gray for the loss of his two hundred head of cattle out of the rewards he was due to collect on Hermanùco. Then he proposed, point-blank, that he invest the balance with John Hale in cattle. Hale agreed at once, and Boyd left the two men chattering like old friends.

He found Juanita in the garden. The sun had set, leaving only its telltale banners of pink above the western hills. The air was cooling and sweet with the scent of flowers. The odor of mesquite wood was like incense. There was no sound save the soft murmur of water rippling down from the spring.

"I am going to stay here, Juanita," said Boyd, taking her hands and looking down into her warm, lustrous eyes.

"I know, señor," she answered simply, turning her gaze away.

"Not señor," protested Boyd. "Won't you call me Bart?"

"Señor Bart?" she said in a teasing voice.

"Just Bart," said Boyd with a mock severity. "Juanita, how did you know I was going to stay?"

The flush deepened. "Benito," she whispered. "He told me."

"Why that little devil knows—knew—everything!" Boyd blurted. Then he laughed boyishly. "And you knew, too, Juanita, that I love you?"

Her arms crept about his neck as he drew her to him. *"Si,* Señor Bart," she said softly.

As he kissed her they heard a clapping of hands and, turning hastily, they saw Benito in the path, his white teeth flashing in a joyous smile.

"Bueno!" the boy cried as Boyd beckoned to him.

HUNTING BIG GAME BY MOTOR

THE motor has undoubtedly changed many methods of work and play, and few will deny the vast advantages it has brought to mankind, but there are some discordant voices raised. Listen to one protest, for example.

Here is a veteran guide of the Maine woods telling us that "Getting a deer or a moose twenty-five years ago was a man's work. Reaching the best-hunting grounds meant long journeys into the dense forests, and sleeping under any old lean-to. Now I can hop into a closed car and in two hours be within a mile of camp. The camp will be warm and comfortable, the food good, and the game almost within gunshot. It's going to be a pretty rough experience, ain't it?" Contrasted with the hardships of earlier days, when getting to the wild game meant endless journeys by canoe, and long portages through country that was still a wilderness, it must be admitted that the guide has ground for his sarcasm.

It seems to be pretty well established that in sports of all kinds, the true sportist—if we may coin a word—declares, like Mrs. Battle, for "the rigor of the game."

Because He Listened In

By W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Bad and Mad," etc.

THERE was no doubt that Jim Allen, alias Jim Asher, alias the "Laramie Kid," and other aliases too numerous to recount, had been having a run of hard luck. Things had been breaking badly for Laramie, as he was more generally known down where the Gila flows.

Laramie was of medium height, rather scrawny, thin faced, peaked nosed, generally in need of a shave and a hair cut—a tough hombre withal, and of exceeding speed with a six-shooter. Poker was a passion with Laramie, and he had an idea that all dealers were crooked. He knew what he'd do, if he were in their place—and blamed them exceedingly for doing it.

There was, therefore, quite a commotion in the palatial Yellow Moon Saloon in Los Noches, when Laramie planted a .45 slug through the right arm of a silk-shirted dealer, because Laramie discarded an ace and a king, only to discover that the dealer held an ace full on kings. The percentage was all against the dealer holding such a hand, and Laramie didn't believe in what is commonly termed a coincidence.

The sheriff at Los Noches thereby, being filled with civic pride, considered Laramie at fault, and they swapped lead all around the main street of Los Noches, aided and abetted by other civic-minded citizens, who felt that the honor of Los Noches needed upholding, with the result that Laramie got away with a more or less shot-up horse, but his own skin intact.

Ten miles out of Los Noches, the horse gave up the ghost, or whatever it is that keeps a horse together, and Laramie faced the terrible predicament of walking or sitting down to starve. Laramie wasn't a walker. As far back as he could remember, he had always ridden a horse. He didn't want to go back to Los Noches. They had queer ideas, those folks of Los Noches. All that fuss over a crooked gambler! Ridiculous! Laramie was bitter. He had a good saddle. But what use is a saddle, when one has no horse? No, he most surely would not go back to Los Noches; so he went in the opposite direction. There was always an opening for an energetic young man, and Laramie *was* energetic.

And that was part of the reason why

Laramie awoke in the loft of a stable, somewhere in the next county, twenty miles or more away from Los Noches. He was stiff and sore, ravenously hungry, mentally alert—and without a cartridge for his six-shooter. It had been quite a battle in that Los Noches street.

Laramie had discovered this cattle ranch in the dark, and, being of a cautious frame of mind, decided not to bother the inhabitants; so he had climbed to the loft and slept in what little hay remained.

Now he sat up, wiped his sleep-filled eyes, and listened to the voices of two men, which drifted up to him through the many cracks in the rough flooring. One man's voice droned a little, and Laramie was not able to hear what he said; but the reply was plain enough:

"That sounds pretty good, pardner, but I'll tell yuh what I'd do; I'd pull that job this side of the crossin', at that hair-pin turn on the grade. That's a dinger of a place. Yuh can watch both ways, and there's a trail off the pinnacle. When yo're plannin' a job like that, always figure yore get-away."

"But the driver is in on the deal."

"Shore—I know that! But you've got to protect him, don'tcha see? You've got to make it look right to the sheriff. Yuh can't stick up a stage and git twenty thousand dollars without stirrin' up a lotta dust. That's *money!* That stage comes along at about ten o'clock to-morrow mornin', packin' a fortune. There ain't no guard, 'cause nobody expects the stage to be packin' real money. That's great. The holdup man wears a blue shirt——"

"But the driver will lie about the description, Larry; and the sheriff will never find a man who corresponds to the one who robbed the stage."

"That's great. But I'd pull it off at the hair-pin turn, if I was you."

"All right, Larry; you know better about it than I do. Now, that's all set."

Laramie was wide awake now. The two men left the stable, and he scuttled over to peer out through a crack in the wall. They were now standing near the corral fence, and he could see one of them quite plain.

"Larry Brett," grunted Laramie, half aloud. "Dunno the other one. Whatcha know about that? Twenty thousand dollars, and the stage driver is in on it!"

Laramie stretched out flat on his back, squinting at the sunbeams through the cracks in the roof. He lifted one arm and looked at his shirt sleeve. It was blue. Not a glaring blue, but the sky-blue of a shirt which had gone to the wash many times.

"Blue enough," he decided. "Plenty blue. I ain't got a shell left for the old gun, if anythin' should break wrong; but he said the driver was in on the deal. Don't need no shells. All I need is a horse and saddle. Twenty thousand dollars! And they'll pull the deal at the hair-pin turn on the grade at ten o'clock in the mornin', eh?

"I've gotta stay right here until t'night, starve or no starve. Then I'll git me a horse and saddle, and when that stage reaches the hair-pin curve little Laramie will be a long ways off, packin' the dinero. I'll head for a little valley off the Gila, buy me a little outfit, and be somebody."

For quite a number of years old Eph Jones had driven the stage between Wheeler and Silver City. Jones was a tall old leatherneck, bearded to the eyes, gnarled of hand. He drove the four tough bronchos over the bad grades with a grip of steel, scaring passengers half to death, when he had any passengers, by the way he swung those four horses around the dangerous turns. The old stage was really a relic, but Eph kept it in repair and never missed a trip.

He usually started from Wheeler about four o'clock in the morning, in order to reach Silver City before the

heat became unbearable. By doing this he could arrive there by eleven o'clock, and at that time, even in the summer, the thermometer did not show worse than one hundred and ten degrees in the shade.

On this certain morning he pulled out of Wheeler at the right time. There was no hint that the old stage carried a fortune. As usual, old Eph placed a sawed-off shotgun on the seat beside him, took a big chew of tobacco, yelled to his horses, and went out of Wheeler in a cloud of dust. He had no passengers.

There had been holdups on the road to Silver City, but Eph had never been stopped by any of the festive highwaymen. Only at odd periods was there enough wealth on the stage for any intrepid outlaw to bother about. There were mines out of Wheeler; gold mines, which often sold their gold to the bank at Wheeler, which in turn shipped it to Silver City by stage, to be sent from there to the mint.

Laramie knew this. He had often thought of trying to work some scheme to find out when these shipments were to be made, but he had never made the proper connections. There was no use taking pot-luck with a daily stage.

Old Eph Jones kept his four horses traveling at top speed, and the desert road unwound behind him like a ribbon of tawny silk. Daylight came. He took off his heavy coat, bit off another chew of tobacco, and kept going. The sun came up, and in a short time the coats of the horses were caked from moisture and dust.

There would be water at the crossing of Lost Creek; the only water between Wheeler and Silver City. Lost Creek disappeared shortly below the crossing, never to appear again. It was nearly ten o'clock when the lead horses of the stage splashed into the crossing. Eph drove them far enough ahead to allow the wheelers to drink.

On the other side, the road slanted sharply upward for fifty feet, where it leveled again for possibly a quarter of a mile before climbing the grades. It was little over a mile to the hair-pin turn.

The horses were checked before drinking their fill. Old Eph kicked off the brake, and his long whip snapped over their lean backs like the report of a small rifle. They jerked into their collars and sprang ahead, while the whip hissed and popped, urging them to drag the heavy stage over that sharp pull.

"Tighten yore tugs, you bat-eared scorpions!" yelled old Eph. "Git goin', you buzzard bait!"

The horses dug to their work, and the big stage lurched up over the rim. But right here occurred an interruption. The leaders swung aside, crowding the brush beside the road, swinging one wheel out of the rut. Old Eph swung hard on the lines, jammed a big foot down on the brake, and swore bitterly through his dusty whiskers.

In the middle of the road stood a man, his face masked, a big gun in his right hand. He had cleverly swung the leaders into the brush, and the stage was blocked. Eph grumbled and squinted at the robber, who kept him covered with the big gun.

"Changed m' mind about the hair-pin turn," he said to Eph. "Throw down the treasure box."

Eph slowly bent, lifted up the iron-bound box beneath his big feet, and tossed it down. It was not a big box; only about eighteen inches long, nearly square. On it was lettered "Wells Fargo Co." in white letters. Without taking his eyes off old Eph, the bandit picked it up. It was heavy, and he needed both hands.

"See yuh later," he said meaningly, turned, and started for the brush ahead of the team.

Eph's right hand dropped to the shotgun. With a twist of his wrist he

turned the barrels toward the retreating form, and a lean finger tightened over the trigger. A moment later, the stillness of the hills was broken by the crashing report of the old .10-gauge shotgun.

The bandit stopped, staggered sideways, dropped the heavy box, and fell over it.

"Them there buckshot," said old Eph, as he climbed down over a wheel, "are shore e-fective on half-witted holdup men."

Then he went over, picked up the wounded man, and took him to the stage, where he roped him well, threw him inside, and went back to get the treasure chest.

"Goin' to be a little late at Silver City," he said thoughtfully, as he kicked off the brake. "Tighten yore tugs, you bat-eared buzzards!"

It was about three o'clock that same afternoon. Sheriff "Buck" Nolan was sitting out in front of his office at Silver City, seeking what little shade there was to be had, which wasn't much, when Larry Brett, foreman of the J80, and another man, dressed in cowboy habiliments, came down the sidewalk to the office.

"Hyah, Larry!" greeted the sheriff wearily.

"'Lo, Buck! Shake hands with Jimmy Colvin."

They shook hands solemnly. Colvin was a slight, youngish man, with blue eyes and a wide smile, while Larry was gaunt, angular, hard bitten.

"I heard about the holdup this mornin'," said Larry. "They was tellin' us up at the store. Was it really the Laramie Kid?"

"It shore was and is," smiled the sheriff. "Doc Hardy jist fixed him all up fine. I jist got word that he smoked up Los Noches night afore last. Cut down on a gambler and busted him plenty. Then he tried to whip the whole town. Nicked the sheriff and got plumb away."

"Is he hurt bad, Buck?" Larry inquired solicitously.

"Not very. A buckshot petted him on the head, and another went plumb through his left arm below the shoulder. Nope, he ain't hurt none to speak about. The nervy cuss never had a shell in his gun nor in his pockets."

"That jasper must be loco. Say! Somebody stole a horse and a saddle from the J80 stable last night, and I wondered if Laramie——"

"I ain't been out lookin' for his horse. Want to talk to Laramie? Shore, he's able to talk, judgin' from the cussin' he gave the doctor."

"I *would* like to talk to him," said Colvin eagerly.

"C'mon in," said the sheriff.

They found Laramie sitting on the edge of his little cot, holding his head in his hands. He looked up at them and recognized Larry.

"Hyah, Brett!" he said shortly.

"'Lo, Laramie! Long time I no see yuh."

"'F I had my way about it, it'd be a darned longer time before yuh'd ever see me again."

"I s'pose," grinned Larry. "And if yuh look at it right, it probably *will* be a long time, Laramie. Did you steal a horse and saddle from the J80 last night?"

Laramie thought it over for a while. Then he said:

"Yuh can't prove *that* on me. But I seen a J80 horse tied off the road, left-hand side, jist this side of the crossin'. Mebby that's yore bronc and saddle. I didn't see nobody with it."

Colvin had taken out a folded piece of paper and was making notes. Laramie looked him over curiously, but said nothing.

"How much money was in that box?" asked Larry.

"Danged close to twenty thousand,"

said the sheriff. "They couldn't give me the exact figures at the bank yet."

Laramie squinted sideways at Larry. The amount was nearly correct, but Larry merely looked at Colvin, a grin on his lips.

"The crossing came nearly being the right place," said Colvin.

"That's right," agreed Larry. "Never heard of anythin' so strange in my life."

"What's all this about?" demanded Laramie. "Who's that jigger"—pointing at Colvin—"and what's he writin' anyhow?"

"This is Mr. Colvin, Laramie. He's stayin' at the J80, gittin' what he calls 'local color.' Writin' a Western story, and yuh never seen a man so particular. He had to have a holdup in the story, and he wanted to locate it right. He wrote it at the ford of Lost Creek, and I told him that the hair-pin curve was the right place. He was right. There was to be twenty thousand on the stage, and the driver was one of the crooks, and——"

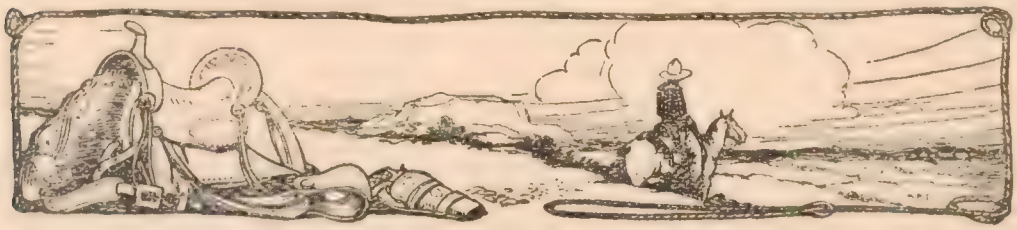
Laramie covered his face with his hands for a moment.

"Git out of here, will yuh?" he said savagely. "My head aches, and I—I want time to think."

They got up together and started for the door.

"Mr. Laramie," said Colvin, "may I come back and talk with you later? I'd like to get your reactions——"

"Better let him alone," advised the sheriff. "He's in bad shape."

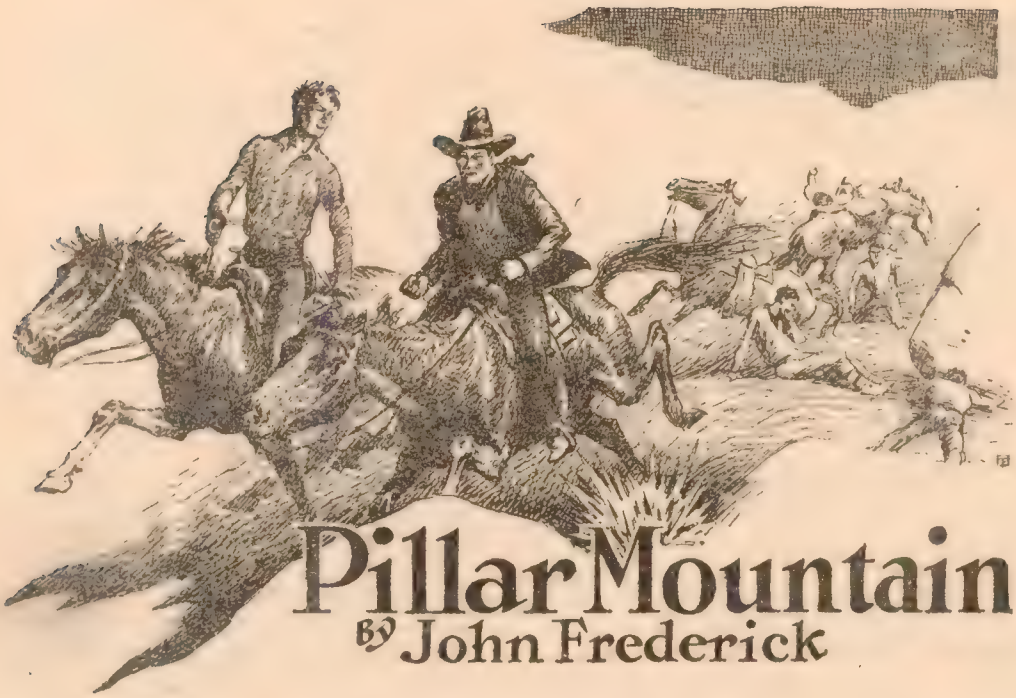


THE CANADIAN INDIAN TURNS TO THE PLOW

DIVORCED from the chase, the Indian of Canada has at last become a farmer is the report that comes from Ottawa. And this turn to the plow seems, so far, to have had a beneficial effect upon the red man, since what ten years ago was a fast-dwindling race is once more commencing to multiply. In virtually all the provinces where reside the hundred thousand Indians who are wards of the Canadian government, there has been a steady increase in the cultivation of the reserves, until now the tribesman is beginning to take a real interest in agriculture. Proof of this lies in the fact that an Indian was the runner-up in the provincial plowing match in Ontario during the past year, holds an executive office in the Ontario Plowman's Association, and may be the provincial champion next year.

Forty-three years ago the Indians of the West entered into a treaty with the government and started to lay aside the tomahawk. Last year they raised a million bushels of grain, and seeded almost sixty-five thousand acres of wheat, while six thousand acres of new land were broken. The Indians have also become interested in mixed farming; and two carloads of steers from the Duck Lake Reserve recently won first prize in a competition open to all Saskatchewan.

It is thought that the greatest part of the credit for these innovations in reservation life is due to the schools that teach the young Indian how to farm. These members of the younger generation are not only modernizing farming but are also learning sanitation, so that mortality from diseases is decreasing.



Pillar Mountain

By John Frederick

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

PHILIP, adopted by Oliver Aytoun, leaves the mountains to make his way in the world. He meets "Doc" Rivers, under whose care he is placed by a suspicious sheriff. He falls foul of the Chisholm brothers, bandits, and leaves them badly damaged, to their surprise. Doc Rivers takes him to the home of his masterful mother. Here Philip meets Maisie Delmar, learns of the Dorman and Purchass gangs, and hears of the redoubtable colonel. Sheldon, a newcomer on the Rivers' ranch, seems to Philip to be a suspicious character.

Maisie's brother, Jolly, reckless but lovable, is in hiding from the Purchass gang. Young Jim of that name has shot himself with Jolly's gun, and the Purchasses are unpleasantly cynical on the subject. The susceptible Philip offers to rescue Jolly, and he and Doc are bringing him home triumphantly at night, when they are stopped by three Purchass horsemen, one of whom lights a match to inspect them.

CHAPTER XXII.

A TEN STRIKE.

WHAT the cornered rat does, Philip did now. With no real hope left, he flung himself straight forward into the path of danger. The reins he abandoned, trusting solely to the grip of his knees, which sank through the hard leather of the saddle flaps as though it had been cloth. Driving his heels into the tender flanks of the horse, he made it spring forward like a frightened cat.

He who sat nearest in front fired. It would have been a kill in any other time, but the match light had just flared from blue to yellow, and the whole party was dimly washed across with strange shadows. So there was merely a jet of flame almost in Philip's face, and a bullet past his cheek as his horse darted in. He caught the rifleman with his right arm; in the confusion of his mind, he could think of no other way of checking the fire. But with all his might he met the shock as his horse tore on, and the rider was dragged from his saddle and lay writhing and cursing in Philip's arms.

The man who had lighted the match had dropped it and snatched a gun; with that revolver he now opened fire. The first bullet struck Philip's burden

with a shock which Philip himself felt distinctly. There was a wild cry of pain and despair; and with the rush of the horse to help him, Philip raised that groaning body and drove it fairly against horseman No. 3.

As effectually as though a thunderbolt had struck him, that warrior was knocked from his saddle; a yell of rage and surprise mingled with the cry of the first victim—and there lay the open trail before him.

He grappled the reins and drew back his frightened mount, but Jolly shot instantly past him.

"They're all down! Ride like wildfire!" he called as he went by.

And, looking back, Philip could make out three riderless horses milling, and yonder the shadow of a man arising from the ground and pouring out tremendous promises of vengeance. The other two lay still and groaned. That was enough. The pass lay smoother before him now, and he gave his horse the rein and let it fly in pursuit of Jolly. The next moment they were in an open wood, Jolly a scant distance ahead, and the dim trunks shooting past with startling velocity.

Presently Delmar drew up, jogging his horse easily.

"Easy to the edge of the woods," he said to Philip. "And then from the edge we'll bolt for the barn. They can't hit us going the pace we'll be traveling, and in this light. They can't hit us, except by luck, and luck they ain't gunna have. No luck for nobody, except us, old son! No luck for nobody, except us!"

He seemed in a pure frenzy of joy, and drawing his horse to the side of Philip's mount, he grasped the arm of the boy and worked his fingers into the great, ropelike muscles.

"I see why they sent you. I thought it was a chunk of lightning going ahead of me. I thought it was a cannon ball knocking a lane through those fellows. And I see how you done it. I *feel* how you done it!"

He gave another squeeze to Philip's thick arm.

"I'll never forget, Phil," he vowed. "I'll remember you forever and everywhere. You planned this thing, and you pushed it throught. A kid like you has made old Purchass and all his cutthroats a lot of fools. But I tell you, kid, this here is a golden night for you! More gold than there is in the sun!"

He broke off his strange and exultant speech, laughing again in savage delight.

But Philip hardly heard the words. What Jolly said was all very well, but what was important was the word which Maisie might speak at the end of the trail, if he lived that long. And with his eyes half closed, smiling, tense, Philip waited for that rich moment.

They drifted on through the woods at ease. Every inch of this ground was known to Jolly now, and he guided them perfectly. So they came to the verge of the woods, and it was like passing from dark to dawn, so much brighter was the starlit landscape outside the shadows.

To the left, and a quarter of a mile away—no more—they saw two lights from the Delmar house, and nearer at hand was the looming shadow of the barns.

"Fast, kid! ride fast and hard!" said Jolly. "Aim for the right corner of the barn. Keep low in the saddle. I think we're gunna collect a few bullets on our way!"

Then he started like an arrow and drove his horse, which grunted with pain as the spurs went home, frantically across the open. Philip followed, at a much milder pace, with his horse coming up against the bit of its own volition. But they had better luck than even Jolly had expected, for there was not a single bullet fired at them

as they crashed around the corner of the barn and brought their sweating horses to a stop at the front of the building.

The shrill voice of old Delmar called from a shadow, somewhere: "Who's that? Answer up sharp now. I got the pair of you well covered!"

"Dad!" laughed Jolly. "It's me!"

There was a joyous cry in answer, and Philip, taking the horses, led them into the barn, and then busied himself in feeding and watering them. Presently a lantern approached, with the shadows of a man's legs sweeping vastly across the side of the barn. Loafer, as though in fear, crowded back against his master and snarled, with bristling mane.

It was only Harry Sheldon, but as he came closer, Philip had to call out: "Keep back, Sheldon! Loafer is going wild again. I'm sorry."

"That dog is a fool!" exclaimed Sheldon angrily. "Can't you teach him better sense than that?"

"I never saw him act this way before," admitted Philip, troubled. "There's something about you that he doesn't like."

"What?" snapped Sheldon. "What's there about me that he don't like? What's wrong, I should like to know?"

He raised his lantern so that the light, falling in a wider circle, might strike on the dog. So doing, he showed Loafer with eyes of emerald green crouched before his master. But he also showed his own face, and Philip stared at it, entranced. For the little man seemed deathly white under the glare of the lantern. There was an odd smile upon his lips, and his eyes were as Philip had seen them before—blank and dead, like black velvet.

"What's there about me that he don't like?" persisted Sheldon. "I tell you, the dog's a fool!"

He apparently had come to help in putting up the horses, but now he turned on his heel and the shadow of his body fell in a thick dark shaft over Philip and the dog.

At the open sliding door, Sheldon turned again.

"I gotta say just this, kid. If you want that dog to live, you gotta teach him better manners. I ain't gunna put up with it. You hear me talk?"

Then he disappeared, and Philip wondered why it was that he did not feel a hotter anger choking in his throat. Indeed, he felt no anger at all, but only a cold sense of dread.

A voice began to call from the house. He heard his own name. And as he hurried from the barn, old Delmar came to meet him, reaching out both hands through the starlit night.

"Jolly's told us something of what you've done, my boy," said he. "Maisie was a wise woman to find you and bring you here. Bless you, my son! I think you've put an end to all our troubles. Come in with me! We have some things to say to you!"

Philip followed dumbly, but at the door a cold dew was on his forehead. He was quite ill at ease.

"I don't want to be thanked," he muttered. "It was only a game, Mr. Delmar. You—I——"

The door was jerked open; he was thrust from the veranda into the dining room where Jolly was already seated at the table, with George, the old negro cook, hanging over him in delight.

Maisie was sitting by her brother poring over him more like a mother, as it seemed to Philip, than a sister.

"I got him. He didn't want to come," crowed old Delmar. "But I got him. He don't want to be thanked. He says it was a game!"

Jolly threw back his head and laughed.

"Sure it was a game—ninepins, for him! One of them for the ball and the rest for the pins, and he rolled a ten strike!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THAT FEELING OF DANGER.

THE joy and the kindness of the father and son were pleasant enough to Philip, but what he had waited for in expectation that made him cold had been the greeting of Maisie, and Maisie simply gave him no attention whatever. Only now and again, in the riotous supper that followed, did Philip see that her eyes were upon him—not in mockery, not in careless mirth like the others, but seriously, gravely reading his face, as though it were filled with interesting and new things. Yet that earnest regard meant more to Philip than all the praise and the noise of the other two.

There was one fly in the ointment, and that was Sheldon. He remained only a short time at the table, and then left. All the time he remained seated there he kept his eyes upon his plate, but as he went out from the room he looked down at Philip, and the latter, glancing up by chance as Loafer growled ominously, saw a pale sneer of mockery and triumph on the lips of the little man.

It seemed to Philip such an important thing that he was about to speak to one of the others of it, after Sheldon had left the room, but he changed his mind. What he objected to could hardly be fitted into words; there was not a scrap of actual evidence which he could bring to support his feeling that danger to Jolly and the rest was not over and would not be over so long as Sheldon was capable of mischief and remained in the house.

When Sheldon left, Jolly went to the kitchen door and closed it. Then he gathered his family about him with a mysterious gesture. They drew their chairs close together while Jolly, resting one hand on the table, leaned above them with something of the gay seriousness of a seller of patent medicines.

"Speaking of money, dad," said Jolly, "how do we stand?"

Mr. Delmar glanced at Philip and hesitated; so that Philip, taking the hint at once, turned a bright pink and stood up.

"Look here," said Jolly. "The kid is one of us. He brought me home! You sit down, Phil. Go ahead, dad!"

Delmar rubbed his lean knuckles across his chin.

"Well, son," he answered, "I'm broke."

"How long have you been broke?" asked Jolly.

"About eight years."

"You mean that you've been borrowing every year from the bank?"

"That's it."

"You, Maisie," went on the son of the family. "How many new dresses do you have a year?"

"I have enough," said Maisie stoutly.

Jolly smiled upon her. He laid his hand on her head and tilted her face up so that their eyes met fairly.

"Dear old Maisie," said Jolly, and paused a moment, loving her.

"You've been like a poor beggar!" said Jolly. "I know about it. A couple of dresses a year and every dress made over ten times—you sitting up till morning to do the work! Oh, I know about it!"

He removed his hand and stood straighter.

"I've been the sink into which everything has been running. Is that right?"

"No, no, lad!" said the father. "Don't say that to us."

"I do say it!"

Jolly turned to Philip with his happy smile.

"You're going to get a picture of the sort of a worthless gent that you picked up in the hills and brought home, kid. Everything has gone smash here, because of me."

Philip was silent, listening with all

his heart. Since he left Pillar Mountain, filled with hope and vast expectation, he had been forced to admit that the world was by no means the ideal place which fairy tales and romances describe. He had met with brutality, avarice, cunning, treachery, hardness of spirit and heart; but now he felt that he was looking for the first time upon men as they should be. Whatever faults could be laid against the Delmars, at least their attitude to one another was all that even an idealist could have wished to find in the hearts of a family.

"I've been a waster and a lazy hound," went on Jolly. "I know it. But I've never known it so well as I know it to-night. A stranger came out and found me and took me home. Dog-gone it, Phil, that was a fine thing! But even more wonderful to me was old Doc turning out as he did and coming on the trail."

"I wish he was back," said Delmar, shaking his head.

"He'll come back," answered Maisie. "He's delayed, but he ain't apt to get into trouble. Doc can smell danger miles away."

"If they've harmed him," declared Jolly, "I'll tear them in two!"

Delmar looked at his violent son with widening eyes, as though fully seeing him for the first time. But Philip saw that Maisie had looked down a little.

No matter how greatly she loved her brother, she saw him clearly now.

"Let Doc go for a minute," said old Delmar. "Now go on, Jolly."

"Well," said Jolly, "I was ready to run for it, you understand, after my last rub with the Purchass outfit. I *was* running, and only luck, you might say, would have put the thing in my way. No, it was more than luck. I've got to give myself that credit. But I'm asking you to remember the chunk of ore that old Treggar brought down out of the mountains five years ago?"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the father. "Great Scott!" he added, as he began to understand what Jolly meant.

"But it's true! It's true!" cried Jolly. "I tell you, Maisie, I'm going to dress you up in diamonds and pearls and——"

"Sell me to the highest bidder?" grinned Maisie.

"I'm going to make you roll in gold, dear dad," said the son, in an extravagance of love and gratitude. "And I'm going to fix Phil forever. I'm going to turn everything over to you, dad. You'll have the running of it; I wouldn't trust myself!"

"Go on! Go on!" cried Maisie. "I want to know what happened. You're drivin' us crazy, Jolly!"

"It's nothing to the way you'll be before I finish," Jolly assured her. "If I——"

A heavy foot fell on the rear veranda.

"Who's that?" asked Jolly. "My stars! could what I've been saying have been overheard?"

The door which opened onto the veranda from the dining room was flung open, and on the threshold stood Doc Rivers. He leaned against the jamb.

"Well, dash my good-for-nothin' eyes! You ain't been able to get back! Dog-gone me if I believe it!" he roared. "I hardly could get back myself!" He flung himself into a chair; they could see that great hollows were beneath his eyes, and his face was drawn sharply.

"The mountain is full of men. They're growin' out of the rocks. Fightin' men. They got enough to win the battle of Bull Run. I done the running!" said Doc Rivers.

"Good old Doc!" chuckled Jolly.

"I *am* old," said Rivers. "I'm a dog-gone old and wore-out man, after to-day. Maisie, where's your manners? Ain't you gunna give me anything to eat?"

"What would you like?" asked Maisie.

"A dry crust'll do me fine," said Rivers. "I could eat grass. I ain't had a morsel for close onto ten days, I reckon. What've you got?"

"The finest thing you ever heard of."

"You ain't killed the old turkey, Maizie?" cried Rivers.

"Better than that!"

"There ain't anything better than that," said Rivers. "Only—tell me one thing. Did he get you, Jolly? Did the kid do it?"

"He did nothing but," nodded Jolly.

"He's pretty near half a man," remarked Rivers. "Now what's the joke about all this?"

"Listen to Jolly," said the girl. "He's better than turkey and roast sweet potatoes."

"He ain't equal to a lamb chop cut thick, to me," declared Rivers. "What *you* got to say for yourself, foolish?"

"Nothing much," answered Jolly. "Just sit quiet a minute. I'm telling the yarn. I was reminding the folks about old Treggar that brought in the ore five year back."

"Him that was gunna buy up Rockefeller and Morgan and hire the Astors to hold his hosses? Him that killed himself with red-eye before the next morning come? What about Treggar?"

"Will you shut up, Doc? Will you let me tell this here story?"

"Go on," said Rivers. "But you got no style, Jolly."

Jolly glared at his old friend.

"All right," he said, "I'll cut this short. The thing of it is that I was always thinking about Treggar and his find. I knew that the mountains had been prospected from top to heel, of course. But I always had the thing in mind, and one day I got to thinking of a place where—well, to cut the story short, I went up to that place on my last trip out, when I was running from the whole gang of the Purchasses. And, folks, I found it!"

There was a sound like the breathing of wind through thick foliage. Every one leaned forward, intense and eager. Philip himself felt his blood leap in one great pulse, and Jolly waited, scanning their faces.

Suddenly he said: "I dunno what it'll go to the ton. You people can guess better!"

And he took from his pocket a stone that filled half his hand and tossed it onto the table.

It broke a plate to bits, in its fall, and cracked the water pitcher up the side, but no one paid the slightest attention to these accidents. Delmar himself caught up the rock. It was jet-black, but as he turned it, ten thousand bright facets caught the light. He caught up the rock in a shaking hand and raised it to the light.

"It'll go—I dunno—thousands and thousands of dollars to the ton! But—Jolly—you don't mean to say that it crops out like this?"

"Do I mean to say that it crops out?" Jolly smiled. "There's a vein of it a quarter of a mile long lying in plain sight and it's as thick as the body of a man."

Philip closed his eyes and began to think quickly. Rock as thick as the body of a man, a quarter of a mile in length, of unknown depth, and running thousands of dollars to the ton—why, such wealth was simply incalculable! When he looked up again he saw that the circle had changed. The faces around it were pale, and the eyes glittered.

"Where, Jolly?" asked Rivers in a hard voice.

"That's the question——" began Jolly sarcastically.

Then he changed, with an afterthought.

"All right, Doc. You'll know everything, along with the rest of us. If

we can't trust you and Phil, then there's no use trying to trust any one in the world."

And Maisie rather astonished Philip by adding: "That's right, Jolly. That's true."

"Wait till I run up to my room and get that map on the wall," said Jolly. "I can point it out better, that way!"

He hurried from the room, and he left behind him a thick silence.

In the kitchen they could hear the chink of the dishes and then the rattle of the pans, as the cook washed up after the meal. But in the dining room there was no conversation. They heard the footfalls of Jolly mount the stairs three at a time, heard his door crash, and after that silence began. It lasted for long minutes.

"What's happened?" asked Maisie impatiently.

"He's looking for the map," said the father.

"Map? It's hanging right on the wall!" said Maisie.

They stared at one another with a vague surmise of trouble. Still the silence lasted, and finally Doc Rivers stood up from his chair and grasped the shoulder of Philip.

"Look at that darned dog of yours!" he commanded.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE PALE MOONLIGHT.

A HOUSE was a place of dread to the great wolf dog. Usually he worked as much of his body as possible under the chair of his master and remained flattened on the floor, his ears pricked, his big amber eyes darting from side to side to follow every sound.

Now, however, he had come to his feet from his place of shelter and he was stalking toward the inner door of the dining room, his mane bristling and his eyes green with a dangerous light.

The people stood up.

"What does it mean?" asked Maisie.

"I never have seen him act that way before," admitted Philip.

Then he added: "Except the other day, when Harry Sheldon was coming around the corner of the house."

The wolf dog, in the meantime, with consummate care stalked toward the door, and, coming closer to it, he reached out his paw and strove with the upturned nails to draw it open.

"There's something outside!" said Maisie in a frightened whisper.

Old Delmar reached the door with a soft stride and flung it open. Philip could look straight down the hall from the place where he stood, but he could see nothing; yet Loafer showed the greatest signs of emotion. He first crouched low, and then with bristling mane, with bared teeth, he shrank back from the empty threshold as though from before some superior and very dangerous foe.

Doc River drew a long and rattling breath.

"Look, look!" he whispered. "There's —there's a ghost—it must've walked into the room! Look at that dog!"

Loafer had regained the feet of his master and against Philip's legs he backed, trembling convulsively, and showing all the signs of an animal desperate with fear, and yet incapable of striking back. To the others it was uncanny; to Philip, who knew the iron nerve and the mighty heart of that dog, the thing was totally incomprehensible.

Even his hand on the neck of Loafer did not compose that stiff mane; even his voice did not make the trembling cease.

"Something's in his head," said Philip. "I—I don't know what. I've never seen anything like this."

Then Maisie said hurriedly: "Has anything happened to Jolly? Why doesn't he come? Why doesn't Jolly come? Call him, dad?"

Delmar called: "Jolly, oh, Jolly!"

There was no answer. The sound went gently echoing through the hall and up the stairs, but not a voice came back to meet it.

Then Maisie leaped into the doorway.

"Jolly!" she screamed. "Jolly, Jolly! Where are you?"

She hung there, clutching the edge of the door; but still the dreadful silence welled heavily from the dimness of the hallway. Loafer began to growl—not a deep and rumbling sound but a shrill noise like hysteria of fear.

"I'm—I'm going to go see," said Maisie.

With all his might, Philip made the great effort, and finally something snapped in him.

He was able to hurry to her and take her arm.

"You stay back here," he said. "I'll go to see Jolly."

He drew a long Colt as he spoke, not through braggadocio, but with some instinct of self-defense, for it seemed to Philip, for some uncanny reason, that this moment was more terrible than any he yet had faced. Not the attack of the Chisholms in the barroom nor the wild ride through the pass that same evening had supplied a horror and a danger of such magnitude as this.

He would have thought that it was all in his own mind, but plainly, from the dog to old Delmar, every living creature in the room felt somewhat the same emotion.

He made one step into the hallway, and then he heard something more than an echo of his footfall above him.

He hesitated, and down the stairs, slowly, came the form of a man. It turned into the hall. It approached him. Behind him, before his own eyes could distinguish, he heard the girl murmur: "Thank goodness—it's dear Jolly!"

In an instant he himself could distinguish the son of the house and he drew back to let him pass. Jolly came toward them with the same calm, unhurrying stride.

He seemed very unlike one who rushes down with some triumphant information.

"He couldn't find the place on the map and he's trying to spot it in his memory," said Philip to himself. "He's afraid that he'll forget!"

He thought, as Jolly drew into the light, that the face of the young fellow was oddly white and that his eyes were dead and dark, but he had hardly an instant to recognize these features. He heard a violent scratching on the floor; there was a cry of warning from Doc Rivers, and Loafer went past him like a bolt, a half growl, half screech issuing from his throat. Philip tackled the big beast with a cry, and struck it down with the weight of his lunge. But it was all he could do to hold Loafer. The dog writhed and struggled with all its might. There was something serpentine in the cunning, and the fury, and the slipperiness with which it struggled. Once Philip had it only by one hind leg, and Loafer turned and put his teeth on the arm of his master so hard that the sharp points cleaved through the cloth and pricked the skin. Yet Loafer did not bite. And again he was mastered by his owner.

Hot and panting, Philip could straighten at last, for Loafer had pressed himself against the wall and lay with eyes closed, his long tongue thrusting out as he gasped for breath.

All that he saw of Jolly was the back of that young man disappearing through the screen door onto the porch. And then he was aware that the other three who were in the room were looking more than wildly at one another.

"He didn't say a word, did he?" asked Doc Rivers, in a faint whisper.

"It was the dog," said Maisie in a

frightened voice. "It was just that Loafer frightened him a little."

"He'll be back in a moment," added old Delmar.

But Philip knew well enough that they were talking only in the vain effort to keep up their courage. They were far from at ease. He himself went back from the doorway into the hall and closed the door after him; Loafer was pressing against him, skulking in the same mortal terror.

Once more the ugly silence began.

Doc Rivers, grown desperate, broke through it.

"We gotta do something," he said.

They all looked at him. After all, what was there to do?

Again Doc Rivers spoke: "You seen that dog before. He liked Jolly as well as he liked anybody. What made him go at Jolly's throat? I ask you that?"

They all winced. Of course they all had had the same thought and it helped not a whit to have the thought put into words. What devil possessed Loafer?

It would have been pleasant to say that the dog was touched by a momentary madness; but there was an uncanny feeling in Philip that the change in the dog had been brought about by the change in the man. What could that change be? What had made Jolly stay so long upstairs? What had made him come down the stairs, at last, without the map? Why had he walked like a white-faced automaton through their midst?

"Something happened upstairs," said Philip at last. "I'm going up to see."

He resolutely opened the door into the darkness of the hall again; then Loafer came whining and shaking to his feet and seemed to beg him to go no farther. He went on, however, filled with a mortal terror, but forcing himself ahead.

Behind him he heard the voice of Maisie: "Doc, you go with him. 'Skinny,' if you're a man, don't let Phil go up there alone!"

But there was no answer from Doc Rivers, and certainly no companionable footfall sounded behind Philip.

He turned onto the stairs and drove himself remorselessly upward. There was a lamp burning with a small flame at the first landing, and as he approached it, it seemed to him that the flame shrank and changed from yellow to blue; so that he remembered having read of a superstition that flames change color in just this fashion when a spirit approaches them.

He tried to tell himself that this was the rankest folly; but though he could say over the words to his mind, the repetition carried not the slightest conviction.

What would he find there on the floor above?

He remembered suddenly that he did not even know where Jolly's room was, and at that moment he heard a shrill voice—Maisie's voice—calling from below: "Phil! Wait! Wait! I'm coming!"

Then the patter of her feet.

"Keep back!" he managed to say. But it was only a whisper. And then there she was beside him, holding his arm, pressing hard against him. Loafer, too, was trying to shove his muzzle between his legs, and it seemed to Philip that the world was collapsing about him. It had seemed to him that two creatures under the sky were without fear. One of them was Maisie; the other was the great dog; but now both of them were pressing on him in mortal agony of fear.

"I don't want you to go on," said Maisie. "Phil, I want you to come down again, you've done enough. Don't go! For pity's sake don't go to Jolly's room!"

The greatness of her terror gave him strength. His voice came to him.

"You go back, Maisie," said he.

"There's nothing bad. You go back to your father and Doc."

"Down that stairs—alone?" she shuddered. "I'll stay with you, no matter what happens."

And he turned down the hall with her.

A door gaped at the end of it and he knew, somehow, that that was the door to Jolly's room. The moon was up; a pale shaft of its light was falling through the window into the chamber. What would it show them when they gained the threshold?

He pushed on, gritting his teeth; nothing but a blind speed could carry him over that entrance, so he trusted to the force of motion which brought him a full stride within the chamber before he had to halt.

He looked wildly around him. Nothing was out of place. There was no sign of confusion. There was only the pale moonshine lying in a pool on the floor and a continual fall of ghostly light dropping through the open window.

CHAPTER XXV.

A FOOTPRINT.

SUDDENLY Maisie ran ahead of him. It took his breath to see her venture so. She went straight to the window, and there she leaned low over the floor.

"Look, Phil!" she whispered.

Instantly he was beside her.

There was not much—just a trace of mold or earth, but it was in the plain outline of a man's shoe.

The girl darted to a closet and came back with a shoe which she held above the print.

"You see?" she said in the same dreadful murmur. "It's smaller than Jolly's foot. Some one's been here before him! Who was it? Who did Jolly meet here? A Purchass, Phil! But—what did they do to him?"

They stood up and faced each other, staring helplessly, with wide, questioning eyes.

"We've lost him again," murmured the girl. "Oh, Phil, we've lost him again, and now he'll never come back! They've got him and they'll murder him!"

He would have tried to comfort her, but the same horrible thought was strong in his own mind, and no comforting words would come to him. Only, staring at her with wonder, for the first time he felt that she was barely more than a child. She had hitherto seemed armed in complete self-sufficiency; now she was a weak and helpless girl.

Then, most cheerful and matter of fact, they heard the crunching hoofs of a horse biting into the sand and gravel of the back yard. They looked down from the window in time to see Jolly himself mounted in the saddle and riding from the yard the horse which he and Philip had taken from the Purchasses, and leading another behind him. Philip did not need a second glance to make sure that the led horse also had been taken in the same adventure. He recognized the small, well placed, eager head of the thoroughbred.

"It's Jolly!" murmured Maisie.

He leaned far out from the window.

"Jolly! Jolly!" she called. "Where are you going, dear?"

Jolly did not look up.

It might have been the mere effect of the moonlight, but it seemed to Philip that the face of the rider was white and set, as it had been when he walked down through the hall and into the dining room.

"Jolly!" cried Maisie.

But Jolly rode on out of sight around the corner of the house, and the horses, reaching the dusty trail, were heard no more.

"What was it? What happened? It *was* Jolly, wasn't it?" Maisie asked Philip, clinging to him.

"It was—I think it was—I think it was—I don't know," he stammered. "We'd better get back down below."

They came to the door of the room and there the nerves of Loafer gave way with a crash. He bolted ahead of them toward the lamplight that entered softly into the lower hallway. They heard the scratching of his frantic feet, saw his shadow shoot past them, and Maisie dropped helplessly over Philip's arm.

In the curve of his left arm he carried her lightly, wondering at her little weight, and lifting her high so that her head would fall on his shoulder, supported there, her cheek against his cheek. In his right hand he carried his drawn revolver, and with a sidling step, so that he could look up and down the stairs at the same moment, lest danger should rush down behind, or leap up in front, he bore her slowly to the lower floor and then into the dining room.

Old Delmar, with a groan, received her, but almost instantly she opened her eyes, calling wildly: "Jolly! Has he come back! Is he here?"

She saw Philip and reached a feeble hand for him.

"Was it a dream, Phil? Did you and I stand at the window upstairs and see him ride away?"

He nodded, and at that she fell back in the chair, her eyes closed.

Philip repeated hastily to Doc Rivers and to Delmar what they had seen—the footprint near the window, obviously much smaller than one made by the shoe of Jolly, and the strange spectacle of Jolly riding away through the moonlight with a white face, deaf to the voices which called to him from above.

"We'll follow him," said Rivers.

Delmar raised his hand.

"Let him be! Let him be!" he said. "I never forced a child of mine an inch. I'll not start now. Let Jolly go. It—it looks to me like he had something on his conscience. That footprint upstairs—tell me, was it small enough to be the footprint of a woman?"

Doc Rivers groaned with relief.

"That's all it is!" he exclaimed. "It's only some girl that's dropped in on old Jolly and reminded him of something. Something that he took to heart. Thank goodness; because I thought—I thought——"

He bit his lip.

"Here, Maisie," he said, "have a drink of water. You look all done up!"

She pushed the proffered glass away. She had recovered from this spell of weakness with wonderful suddenness and now she sat up straight and tall on the edge of the chair, looking feverishly from one of them to the other.

"Something took Jolly away," she said. "It's no good following. The thing that could take him away in spite of himself would take him away again. We all felt it—I felt it, I mean. Did the rest of you feel sort of winter in your backbone?"

One and all they blinked in acknowledgment of the justice of that comparison.

They all were silent, no one daring to meet the eye of the other. What Philip was thinking of was the cold outer world, windless, chained up with the white, eternal frost of the moon; and he could guess that the others had the same picture in their eyes—of poor Jolly drawn away through that icy wilderness he himself knew not where!

Loafer came suddenly to him from the corner and licked his hand. The dog was himself again. His mane had fallen and the green light had left his eyes; and at the same instant Doc Rivers began to roll a cigarette, and old Delmar to drum on the table with his finger tips.

It was like the lifting of a spell, and Maisie seemed to feel the change also.

"It's gone," she said in a calm and natural voice.

"Aye," nodded her father. "It's gone. And Jolly with it."

"What was it?"

"A ghost," said Doc Rivers with grim belief.

"Ghosts don't leave footmarks on the floor," declared the girl. "And—ghosts don't carry Jolly away from his home."

"Carry him away? He went by himself."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm going to have another look at his room," she said.

They all went up in a crowd, Loafer preceding them and turning down the hall above in the right direction as though he knew perfectly well where they intended to go. As they came into the doorway, Loafer already was at the footmark under the window and, sniffing at it, he snarled savagely, as only a wolf, one would have said, can snarl.

They brought two lamps and flooded the spot with light. There was only the single mark on the floor. Maisie tried her foot beside it, and then looked up significantly, for it was pronouncedly larger than her shoe.

"And I'm no Cinderella," said Maisie, to complete her unspoken thought.

It could well have been the mark of a man's foot, they decided. The stuff which outlined the impression was simply the greenish dust and mold from the shingled roof that sloped down outside the window. In fact, when they held a lamp outside they plainly distinguished three or four places where that same mold had been disturbed, and one was a long scrape, as though the foot of the visitor had slipped.

"If I'd been outside, only, with a gun on him!" groaned Doc Rivers.

But they talked no more about it. Conversation could do no good, and the important matter was: What communication had the stranger given to Jolly Delmar at that hour of the night, in order to make young Delmar leave his home like a stricken man going to his execution? All the manner of Jolly, now that they looked back upon it, had been that of a man going to his death.

Everything about it was strange. It was most unlike Jolly, for instance, to have made such a melodramatic exit, stalking through the dining room in silence while the others gaped at him. Most of all, it was unnatural for him to have made no answer to the voice of his sister when she called to him from his window.

All that was most remarkable. But certainly Jolly was not the one to play a foolish part or take advantage of a singular circumstance to shock his family. A real calamity had fallen upon him. Of that there was no doubt.

He who had made that footprint on the floor of the room was the person who had brought the shock upon him. That also seemed reasonable. But at that point all further conjecture ended.

"Get Sheldon!" said Delmar suddenly. "He's got an eye for sign. Get him here and let him work out this here trail if he can. Maybe an expert can get something out of it!"

Doc Rivers went to call Sheldon, whose room was farther down the hall, but he came back to report that Sheldon was not in his room. Furthermore, no blankets were spread upon his cot.

"Gone, by gravy!" exclaimed old Delmar.

"He's a small man!" broke in Philip. "He might have made that track!"

"He might!" admitted Delmar. "Though why over the roof when he might've gone down the hall——"

They stared hopelessly at one another.

"That runt," breathed Doc Rivers. "A skinny runt like that Sheldon! What could *he* know? What could *he* say?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER JOLLY ONCE MORE.

THE next day Jolly did not come back, and neither did he come the following morning, after which it was agreed in the Delmar household that there was very little likelihood of the boy's coming back. Moreover, no matter how improbable it might appear, every one of the silent and gloomy people in the Delmar house was convinced that he must have ridden straight into the arms of the enemy. Otherwise, if he were back in the neighborhood, he would have attempted to send them some signal.

They were convinced of this, but they were also convinced that nothing they could do would be of the slightest avail. It would be dangerous to scout anywhere near the Purchass house, a gloomy old stronghold among the hills. In short, they needed help, and it was Doc Rivers who proposed what they should do and how they should go about it. They must hunt out the colonel and have speech with him. The law they could not invite in. If it were used, it might open the Purchass house—at some cost to itself—but if Jolly were found, he would be found dead. And if he were recovered alive, he would be transferred to a jail.

All this they were agreed upon, and Rivers suggested that he and Philip ride at once to the colonel and beg him to give his assistance.

As for the colonel's price, since he was an expensive tool, he might be convinced by the talk of the mine, and above all by letting him see the specimen of ore which Jolly had shown to the family. That specimen they still retained; the father had it under lock and key.

The plan was simple enough. If the ore interested the colonel—and it was reasonably sure to do so—they might then offer him a share in the mine in case he would secure the liberation of Jolly. If Jolly were dead, the matter ended there. As for the share, the colonel was to be offered ten per cent of the profits; if need be, Doc Rivers was to raise the offer to fifty per cent of the total! And they felt it was more apt to be near that figure, for the colonel was known to drive a shrewd bargain.

Maisie and old Delmar accepted the plan with enthusiasm. They would give up every penny they might hope to receive from the mine if they could only secure Jolly again; but it was doubted if even the great power of the colonel could persuade the Purchass clan to part from their prisoner.

So Philip and Doc took the road at once. Doc Rivers was to be the persuading agent; Philip was the guard in case of danger on the road, for it was highly probable that the Purchass agents would attempt to take savage revenge for the two whom Philip had hurt, perhaps mortally, in the valley. So they looked to their weapons, and it was while Philip was cleaning his rifle on the rear veranda of the house that Maisie came out and leaned against a narrow wooden pillar beside him. Loafer, who of late distrusted all strangers, now strode from behind his master and lay down on guard between him and the girl.

Yet she did not speak, so that Philip grew more and more self-conscious. At length with clumsy hands he let fell a piece of chamois. It fluttered over the edge of the veranda and slumped to the ground.

"Get it, boy!" commanded Philip, and Loafer slipped over the veranda edge and leaped back, the cloth in his teeth. At the feet of his master he put down the chamois and then again resumed his watchful position, this time seated, with his great head a little to the side.

"He's useful," observed the girl. "How old is he?"

"Uncle Oliver brought him home four years ago when he was a little puppy."

"Hunt with him?"

"He's great at that."

"What?"

"Deer and things."

"Deer?"

"He spots 'em. Then if they're up a pass, say, you can send him around to drive them down to you."

"You've got to hit the deer on the run, then?"

"Oh, yes."

"Humph!" said the girl.

"I suppose you hunt a lot?"

"I get a shot now and then. I'm not very good."

"It takes a lot of practice," admitted Philip kindly.

His color was growing more normal; and he wondered what was in her mind, for it was not the habit of Maisie to talk to no purpose.

"I've had practice," said she. "There's one thing I've worked over."

She pointed to a tall pine which stood near the end of the barn.

"You see that squirrel out there among the needles?"

"I see it," said Philip.

"I've tried for him a hundred times with my rifle. I've had the fur out of him, but never got him."

"He's quick, I guess?"

"He's lightnin'," she assured Philip. "He knows a rifle, too. Don't bother till he sees you put it to your shoulder."

"You might try a revolver, then."

"At that distance?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Oh, nothing," said Maisie with some heat. "Don't you tell me that you can hit a squirrel that far off—with a Colt?"

"Not fanning the gun," corrected Philip. "But like this."

The Colt glided into his hand, swayed up to the level of his eyes, and exploded. The twig on which the squirrel stood was cut in two beneath his feet. He tumbled head overheels, struck the broad branch beneath, and scampered in toward the trunk of the tree, chattering with terror.

"I missed," said Philip, flushing deeply. "I—I'm a little out of practice, I see!"

The girl looked not at him. She was studying the tree with care.

"That's sixty yards," she said presently.

"It's only a little over fifty, I'm afraid," said Philip.

"Humph!" said Maisie.

She turned back to him and said, "If that was a man—it wouldn't have hit his head—it would have cut his throat in two!"

"Perhaps."

"Phil!"

"Yes?"

"Have you ever fired a shot at a man?"

"No, thank Heaven!"

"Would you hate it?"

"Hate it!"

"But before you're a week older you'll have fired."

"I hope not."

"And the man will die," said Maisie with conviction. "Maybe a couple of them will die!"

Philip closed his eyes to shut out the thought.

Maisie went on: "If you don't want to have that kind of trouble—blood on your hands, I mean—you quit this trail. You leave the valley, will you? Go away to some other place. Folks will always be glad to have you."

"I don't know very much," confessed Philip.

"You're about the strongest man in the world, and pretty near the straightest shot. D'you know that?"

He shook his head.

"But you're going to ride into a terrible lot of trouble. I gotta tell you

that. They re fiends. I mean the Purchass lot. They'd kill you with poison, if guns didn't work."

He looked straight before him, seeing this prospect in detail, but he would not surrender.

"Where are you traveling?"

"To find work," said Philip. "I must make a home for Uncle Oliver."

"How old is he?"

"He's a good deal more than sixty."

After this, Maisie folded her hands together at her breast and looked past Philip into space, with sadness and thought in her glance, so that he dared to gaze into her face, and she seemed to him of more than mortal beauty.

"I'll find Jolly or die on the trail," he told her gravely, feeling the words as he uttered them. And as he spoke, he knew that the determination was turning to iron in him.

She looked suddenly down at him again; Loafer growled softly.

"If ever Jolly comes home——" she said and paused there, but something brilliant in her eyes went on speaking to Philip, and a happy mist rushed over his mind.

Through that mist he heard Doc Rivers dimly calling, and still through it he saw two horses led out from the barn.

Somehow he was mounted; automatically he thrust his rifle into the long holster that angled down beneath his right leg. He picked up the reins.

"When in doubt, ride hard!" called old Delmar.

The dimness lifted; Philip saw Maisie waving to them from the veranda; and he told himself that he would live to keep his promise or pay the price which he had vowed to her. She had not finished speaking out the promise, but he felt that she knew and that he knew what had been meant.

Suddenly the trotting horse jerked him past a string of trees. The narrow trunks blurred the sight of the veranda, and the waving girl, and old Delmar standing beside her. And just before they disappeared, Philip thought he saw her turn to her father, wavering like the weariest of all creatures, and so fall into his arms.

But it was only a flash.

Then he was on the open trail, and Doc Rivers was regarding him with a thin, withered, sardonic face.

"Good old Phil!" he said half, sneering. "You sure are the champion simp!"

Philip shrugged his shoulders. He did not understand. He did not want to understand.

"I'll tell you something," said Doc Rivers. "She's a lottery. That's all. You got ticket No. 17,493. That's all. Write it down in your head. I'm telling you straight! And now, for Pete's sake, get that dizzy look out of your face. We gotta have both of our pairs of eyes open on this trip."

CHAPTER XXVII.

SIX FOOT SIX.

THEY dropped rapidly through the hills. Philip's eyes were wide open, indeed, for anger had roused him, and he had checked himself on the verge of making a threatening retort to his companion.

They were riding down a narrow valley, from tall hills to low, with the opening before them to the east. But to the west a high fog was gathering, so that the tops of the mountains floated above it blue and light, like queer-shaped ships floating upon the heavier sea. The forest, ruined in that mist, tangled together for a few hundred yards, and then went out altogether in a massive wall of gray. But to the east there was not a suspicion of moisture in the air. All was bright and crisp, and cool with the autumn chill.

Doc Rivers announced that he would be well pleased to leave the verge of the trees, but he also said they might

as well accept a small danger in the beginning, since they were liable to have far greater perils before the end.

"But," said Philip, speaking suddenly out of the midst of his thoughts, "you tell me that the Purchass people are terribly strong?"

"Strong? Like iron!"

"Then how can one man like the colonel do as he pleases with them?"

"I dunno that he can," replied Doc Rivers. "But the colonel never has failed, people say!"

"Failed to do what?" asked Philip.

"He's never failed to make a stack of money every year of his life since he came out here; he's never failed to keep out of jail; and he's never failed to handle his job. That's a good deal to win out in!"

"It is!" admitted Philip gravely.

"The point about the colonel is that he never takes a crack at the law. He leaves it be. That's where he's got the sense."

"Then how does he make his money?"

"Out of the crooks. Suppose that you're a ranchman. You gotta pretty good ranch, a dog-gone fine layout of cows. But those cows begin to drift. Well, you send for the colonel. He says ten thousand dollars. You pay. The cow-stealing stops. There ain't a cow rustled on your place ever after that!"

"Does he stay on the place and guard it?"

"He don't have to, no more. At first he had to do some things. The Yerkes boys and their gang, he run into them first. They told him where to go. He wasn't even an officer of the law. Well, he run them right up into the hills. He killed three of 'em. He wounded five more. He captured four men, tied 'em together, and he drove 'em down from the mountains barefoot. One of 'em died afterward. One of 'em lost a foot from walking through the snow. And the other two, there wasn't enough manhood left in 'em to make up a boy between the pair. That broke up the Yerkes gang. I mean, it wiped it out! After that, people took the colonel pretty serious. Personal, I'd rather have a chunk of wild cat after me than him!"

"I understand," said Philip, his eyes gleaming. "It seems a very good thing to me. He's a sort of independent officer of the law."

"He ain't. He's hired wildfire. That's what he is! Law? He don't give a darn for the law. It's trouble that he lives for the sake of. Oh, he's a man! Look at Thomason. He had this part of the country staked off for himself. Every year he worked one bank robbery. Then Grier comes in. He begins to raid the banks right and left. He robbed four in three months. Thomason went to the colonel. The colonel went out and brought Grier in, tied to his saddle like a dead deer, you might say. Grier just lived long enough to confess that he was a yegg. They say that Thomason paid the colonel twenty thousand dollars for that job."

"But I should think it would keep down crime a great deal," suggested Philip.

"You would think that, but you don't understand. The colonel don't go ravin' after criminals. He gives out a sort of a charter. Suppose you want to come into the county and work some jobs in a big way—selling stock in mines that ain't, boosting the stock of railroads that never get down to tracks. Well, if you want to do that, you go to the colonel. You pay him. He lets you go. He puts a stamp on you, you might say. You're his man. The rest of his men will give you a hand. They'll help you out. Even out of jail. Well, that's worth something. You gotta pay a price and a darned big one. It's the big money that the colonel is after. He don't mind the little things!"

"And if the criminal on a big scale doesn't pay?"

"The colonel goes down and cleans him up."

"How can he do that without getting put in jail?"

"Because he always has all the evidence. He knows all the crook world and the crook ways. He can do anything he wants—get any information that he wants. I was standing on Main Street and Fourth Avenue one day. A big gent, in long, gray whiskers, was setting in a runabout, jiggering the reins and talking to another gent that had his foot on the hub of the front wheel of the buggy. Up comes big colonel. He takes the whiskered gent by the neck and lifts him out of the wagon. He takes him down the street and chucks him into the jail.

"'Stay there till you've been sentenced and sent up,' says he.

"Well, that gent stayed there. He had to. It was worth his while to stay there, mind you, because if he'd come out, the colonel would have gone for him with a gun."

"If he could lift a grown man like that—from a high seat—he must be very strong!" suggested Philip.

"He's only six foot six. But you'll see him for yourself. You'll admire to see him, kid!"

He began to laugh, a little savagely, and Philip bowed his head.

After all, bigness of body in a man is not the only important feature to be considered. Philip was keen with interest. Other men had been like children. They had broken, their strength had melted away like wax under red-hot pincers when he gripped them. But the colonel, apparently, would be of a somewhat different order, and he was hungry to see the big man.

They were going rapidly toward the town now; and when they had put a good twelve miles behind them, either at raking canter or rapid trot, they looked from a hilltop into a pleasant little dale where a small cottage stood; and beyond the farther crest they could see the city lying in the plain, with wind-bent columns of smoke streaking upward. The pulse of Philip raced as he looked toward it. Somehow he felt that all his adventuring had consisted but of the merest skirmishing upon the borders of things, and that the heart of the adventure was still to come when he reached the town.

"That," said Doc Rivers, "is his place."

"That little house?" asked Philip in amazement.

"That little house," said the other.

"But see!" said Philip. "There are trees walking up to it on three sides! Any man with enemies—they could slip up on him there!"

"They have!" Rivers nodded. "Charlie Hass, he sneaked up by way of the red barn, there. You see? Charlie, he got past the barn. He's buried a little to the right of it, because the colonel believes in planting where the seed falls. That's his way of putting it.

"He made the grave right there in his back yard. He even put up a headboard. What d'you think he wrote on the board?"

"Well, of course I can't guess!"

"'Here died Charlie Hass for want of a better thing to do.' That's the colonel."

Philip listened in amazement. He could imagine killing in the heat of blood; he could imagine only too keenly a furious and savage joy in the conflict. But he could not imagine one who laughed as he struck.

"Turl McGinnis come up through the west grove, there. He got as far as that birch. You see it? You can just make out the white streak of it. Then the colonel took him from behind and finished him."

"Finished him?" echoed Philip.

"Broke his back, you see? The sheriff got out in time to take *his* confession and see him die. There you are! It kind of discouraged the boys from trying to sneak up on the colonel, until a terrible red-headed gent comes up from Arizona and swears that he'll get the colonel, if he has to die for it, because the colonel had killed his best pal. And 'Arizona Red,' he took to the woods also, and come in there from the east, and there he's lying now with a fine grassy grave piled up over him, and on his headboard is written: 'Here lies Arizona Red, far from home.'"

"But how does he do it?" asked simple Philip. "Does he have spies who tell him what's happening? Does he keep the woods filled with his men?"

"Kid," said Doc Rivers with a sort of pitying gravity, "don't you think that if I knew what the colonel knows I wouldn't be nothin' but another colonel? D'you think that I'm self-contented, maybe, bein' nothin' but bullied at home by ma? No, kid, I dunno how the colonel manages it. Nobody knows how the colonel manages it. He's got just one gent to take care of him, and that gent is a chink."

Philip, riding down the hills from the south toward this famous abode, felt as though he were approaching the den of an ogre, and his eyes shone. It was the first touch of life which matched with what he had left behind him with his books on Pillar Mountain.

They crossed a meadow where several horses grazed, each of them a mighty creature of sixteen or seventeen hands, powerful as a draft horse across the quarters, but finished fine and hard at every point.

"They can't carry him uphill," said Doc Rivers, noticing the direction of Philip's glance. "He does the hills on foot. But they can scoot him down the slope, and they can gallop him over the valleys. He don't ride no ways, except the way the wind blows. What the country looks like is nothing to the colonel!"

They came closer, breaking through a meager grove of poplars, and then Philip saw a man lying in an invalid's chair, wrapped in a blanket and sleeping in the sun.

"Hush!" said Rivers. "That's him!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MY DOG LOAFER.

HIS eyes were closed. He was turned well south so that the full might of the sun beat against him, and as Philip and Doc Rivers came closer, dismounting from their horses, they could see that this must have been an old practice with the great man, for his very eyelids were bronzed by the sunlight, and above his eyes the forehead, usually shaded by the wide sombrero, was nut-brown to almost the verge of the hair, where indeed a pale streak occurred.

This was only the first impression of the giant, but a closer inspection showed that he was a book that would take much reading. In every way he was massive. The hand which hung over the arm of the invalid chair, looked like a mighty engine of destruction. His pointed beard and elegant mustache could not disguise for a moment the power of his jaw, and upon his brow as he slept was the frown of might.

The giant opened his eyes and regarded them in leisurely fashion and with bright, unwinking eyes which appeared of an almost unreal blue because of the blackness of his hair and beard.

"You're young Rivers, I think," said he. "Forgive me if I don't get up! Li!"

He called loudly, and the woods or the face of the house flung back the booming echo once and again. The servant did not need to be told what

was wanted. He appeared now carrying two chairs, which he placed, with a bow for each guest.

"I'm Rivers," replied Doc as he took a seat, "and here's a friend of mine. Sit down, Phil!"

But Philip first acknowledged this introduction by advancing a step, very frightened, and taking the hand of the giant. It hung loose and cold and moist in his grasp; it did not return the pressure of his handshake, and he gained his chair depressed and more overawed than before.

"You've come a distance?" asked the giant.

"From the Delmar house," said Rivers, and waited a little.

"That's twelve miles and a half," said the colonel. "How is everything with the Delmars?"

He had a lazy, luxurious way of speaking. His lips were astonishingly red and looked as though they had been polished; they parted and remained open for a moment always before a sound came. And at the end they were still parted, as though something more were about to be uttered.

"The Delmars are well enough, what's left of them," answered Doc Rivers.

"One of them dead?" asked the colonel.

"Gone," said Doc Rivers.

"The pretty girl has eloped at last?"

"She's still home."

"It's the boy then. He's been due for trouble for a long time."

"He's been havin' it, too, sir."

It seemed to Philip that Rivers appeared like a child at school in front of the colonel, so stiffly did he sit in his chair.

Li brought tea and fruit and placed it on a little bamboo table between them, but Philip would not eat. He was too enormously interested in this man out of a fairy tale.

The colonel pressed them. He pointed out the dark-red cheeks of the pears and the rich yellow of ripeness which set it off. He picked up an apple and began to set an example by eating it. He ate with small bites, with very white teeth that seemed, like his lips, to be polished; so did they flash in the sun. And his blue, unwinking eyes flashed above. The sky at clear midnight reminded Philip of those eyes; he could imagine that the sea lying level and windless under the morning sun might be like those eyes. As for the light in them, it was like that which might slip and glide along a fine sword blade exposed for sale and slowly turned.

The eyes of other men were mere windows out of which they peeped now and again; and through which others might have a glance of all that was inside. But the eyes of the colonel were very different. They were a portion of the bright, blue, terrible soul within him. When he glanced at Philip it was like the impact of a heavy weight, and the boy was glad that Rivers was occupying most of the attention of the great man. It was very easy to understand how he could run two or three counties, each as big as a New England State. It was only wonderful that he did not make himself a king in whatever part of the world amused him most.

"Young Delmar has been having his trouble, then?" said the colonel. "He was out of date; he thought that he lived in the Garden of Eden. What about him? Is that your errand to me?"

"Yes," nodded Rivers. "Jolly's gone. I dunno how. They switched him away after the kid and me brought him in through their lines!"

He said it with a little ring of pride. The colonel, at this, allowed his great head to roll slowly to one side, so that his attention bore full upon the face of Philip.

"Are you the one who came through the pass and threw the Purchass men about?" he asked.

Philip blinked. This sudden attention raised a lump in his throat around which he could not speak, and Rivers had to say: "That's the man, sir!"

The colonel began to laugh softly. He let his eyes close, and his laughter boomed in him as in a cave. Loafer got up, looked the giant in the face, and began to growl.

"Hush!" said Philip, and the wolf dog sat down between his legs.

"Five broken ribs, a broken hip, a dislocated shoulder, and a bullet out of their own guns. That's what makes it beautiful. That's what makes it a lovely affair!"

He drew a breath slowly as though retasting the pleasure of that sport.

"One only has a few perfect moments in a long life," he said to Philip. "Treasure this one. Print it deep in your mind. It is better than a volume of poems. Now, Rivers, tell me what you want?"

"I want you," said Rivers.

The colonel merely nodded.

"Jolly's gone; the Purchass people have him; well, we want you to get him back."

"My dear boy," answered the colonel. "I love the trusting way in which you approach me! But the Purchass lot are the strongest group in the mountains. I'm only a single man, and they're at least thirty effective fighting men and more if they want to send out for them."

"Yes, sir," said Rivers.

"You know that. But why do you come to me?"

"Because I got this idea—that you and Phil, together, could smash through walls of rocks and beat armies to a pulp."

"He flatters us, eh?" said the colonel to Philip. "Give me your revolver."

Obediently, Philip laid it in the hand of the giant, and the latter went over it in detail, examining every small point.

"Yes," he said, handing back the gun, "you've learned to shoot very well. Why have I never heard of you before?"

"He's just come into these parts," explained Rivers.

The colonel closed his eyes again, and Philip was glad of it, for while they were open, he was under a constant strain.

"I don't see what I could do for you, Rivers," he answered at last. "Admitting that Philip is a fighting man of the first water—of the very first water—still, it only takes two bullets to end two men, and the Purchass tribe have a great plenty of bullets."

"I wanted to talk it all over," said Rivers. "I wanted to offer you something worth while, sir."

"Don't tempt me," answered the colonel. He pointed suddenly at Loafer. "That's a dog," he said.

"Thank you," said Philip.

"He would take off my hand at the wrist, I think."

"He would, sir."

"Will he watch over you at night?"

"He will, sir."

"And guard you?"

"I have to keep him tied up every night."

"Young man, what price have you for that dog?"

The blue eyes of Philip opened enormously wide.

"I don't understand," said he.

"You speak English, I hope?" asked the giant. "I say, will you sell that dog?"

"He wouldn't stay with you," declared Philip. "He'd run away."

"Nothing runs away from me," replied the colonel severely. "He would stay if I cared to keep him. Now, my lad, what's your price?"

Philip shook his head. He reached

out a sudden hand and at the touch of it, Loafer turned his head a little, and closed his eyes with joy.

"I wouldn't sell him," said Philip.

"You think not," smiled the colonel. "Nevertheless, I shall buy him. I'll offer you a hundred dollars, my boy."

"It would be selling part of myself. Loafer—he's a friend, you see."

"Five hundred dollars," said the colonel.

"Sweet—sufferin'—mamma!" said Doc Rivers.

"No, no!" said Philip.

"Think what you're saying," said the colonel. "I'm offering you now a thousand dollars in hard cash. Enough to set you up in the world. A thousand dollars for a dog, young man!"

"Phil, don't you be a fool!" broke in Rivers, his eyes starting.

Philip folded his hands together and squeezed them hard. He could hardly hear the words. He could only see the flashing blue eyes that seemed to threaten him with untold dangers. Yet he managed to stammer: "It's not exactly that he's a dog. But he's a friend, sir. I couldn't sell myself. I couldn't sell myself! I couldn't sell the dog!"

The colonel lay back in his chair again and waved a great hand airily.

"There you are, Rivers. You come to me to buy me. Learn from your friend. I can't even buy his dog!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GIANT AVARICE.

GREATLY excited was Doc Rivers. There was some flaw in this reasoning, but he could not put his finger on it. The colonel was talking down to him from a height, but he could not prevent the condescension.

"It's not the same," he ventured.

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"There's a dog; here's a man. No price for one, no price for the other!"

Suddenly Rivers snatched out the chunk of ore and laid it in the lap of the colonel.

"Look at that," he said.

The colonel looked at it. It seemed to Philip that there was no alteration in his demeanor or in his expression, except that perhaps his blue eyes grew a little more flashingly bright, a little grayer, a little more like steel in the sun.

"That's an expensive bit of ore," he admitted.

"That is what the trouble's about," said Rivers. "I would've thought that Jolly was just a dead man by this time. But this won't let me think that. Jolly found this. Somehow the Purchass gang know about it. They've got him now. They're putting the pressure on him. Maybe they're offering him his life if he'll tell them about where this here gold is. You see? Now you know why we're here talkin' to you, sir."

The colonel nodded. He weighed the rock on his forefinger.

"Somebody will be enormously rich out of this," he suggested.

"Richer'n Kreeshus!" said Rivers heartily. "And why shouldn't you be one?"

"I?" said the colonel, and raised his brows, as though rather shocked by such a thought. "I? But my dear fellow, let me tell you that there's something else worth thinking about. My own attitude toward life. You see that I live here quietly. I detest disturbances. I like enough money to live on. In a modest way, I collect enough for my needs. And there you are! I've no desire for a vast fortune. None whatever! None whatever! Enough for my needs is all I ask."

He shook his head with violence, and while his eyes remained closed, Rivers shot at the boy a glance expressive of disgust and rage. Even Philip could see that there was a touch of hypocrisy

about this fellow with his speeches about modest ambitions, small requirements of living.

It was as though a pirate should pretend to the manner of a philosopher!

"I jus' want to point out," said Rivers gravely, "that this here ain't thousands. Maybe it's hundreds of thousands—maybe it's millions, colonel!"

The colonel raised a protesting hand. It was a smooth as silk, that hand, and the fingers were long and tapering.

"You can't tempt me," said he. "You really can't tempt me, my friend. To introduce the management of a large fortune into my quiet mode of life, to occupy my mind with investments and —I couldn't dream of it. I couldn't dream of it! It is like the crash and roar of war. Years steal upon me; I grow more quiet. I lie here in the sun. I think of nothing. You cannot tempt me!"

And with that he looked so mildly upon Rivers and shook his head in such earnestness that Philip was almost tempted to believe what he heard.

Rivers closed his eyes and set his teeth.

"We'll offer you one quarter out of every bit of profit that comes from the mine!" said he.

"If I bring young Delmar away from the Purchasses?" asked the colonel.

"You and Phil, here, and me. We'd work. I know I'm not much good. But Phil is. I've seen him go through them like a canoe through water. They can't hold him. You and him together—that's what I mean!"

"A quarter for me and a quarter for Philip?" suggested the giant.

"Phil, he ain't interested so much in the money end of things."

"A young philosopher?" asked the giant, and he smiled vaguely upon Philip.

"Anyway," said Rivers, "I want you to give it a think. Twenty-five per cent. If you do the job, you never have to think about the thing afterward. It's just in your hands!"

"A very large and handsome offer," said the colonel, obviously thinking hard and fast. "But one never can tell. Mining is an uncertain game. These promising veins pinch out."

"We might even trim up that percentage a little," suggested Rivers. "Say that we called it a third? One third, colonel. That's money, I guess!"

"One third!" said the colonel, and his blue eyes flashed.

Suddenly he shook his head.

"Let's talk of other things," said the colonel in his deliberate manner. "We waste our time about the mine. Besides, the business would be much too difficult for me. You overestimate me. I'm only mortal, Mr. Rivers!"

Rivers jumped up from his chair.

"Colonel," he said, "I'll go right to the top. One half of everything for you—and no work on your part. One half! One half of the clear profits!"

The colonel suddenly writhed in his chair, and for a single instant all the avarice in his soul was shown in his face.

"It's no use!" he declared. "By this time the Purchass people have made an agreement with young Delmar. His life in exchange for the location of the mine!"

"He'd never give in!" said Rivers.

"Ah? Is he a Spartan?"

"You laugh," said Doc Rivers with a heat that surprised Philip. "I tell you, Jolly's better than folks take him for. He's been a fool. He knows it. He's wrecked his family. He knows that, too. Well, he's found the mine and that's his chance to even everything up and make his folks happy, and he'll die ten times quicker'n he'll tell what he knows!"

"Ah?" said the colonel again. "However," he added slowly, "there are ways of persuading people to speak!"

"He'll never give in," said Rivers obstinately. "I know it. I know how he's feeling inside. He'll die quicker."

The colonel sat bolt upright. "Young man," he said, "take your horse and go away. I don't want to talk any longer! Go at once. I—I'm tired and wish to rest in the sun!"

Doc Rivers groaned.

He did not protest, however, but as one who knows that the end has been reached, he made a gesture of surrender and beckoned to Philip. The latter rose also. He could hardly believe that the interview had been ended so suddenly. Something had told him that the pangs of temptation were entering the giant, and that soon he would quite melt under the influence of the bribes which were being offered in return for his support.

Rivers moved off hastily with a single word of farewell, but Philip lingered an instant, until the giant, without opening his tightly shut eyes—as though he felt the mere shadow of the young man's presence—said: "You, too, my young friend. I wish to be alone."

"The dog——" said Philip suddenly. "I wanted to say about the dog——"

At that the blue eyes opened. They blazed out at Philip in a sort of unearthly brightness of triumph.

"You've changed your mind, have you? You'll sell your pet dog, after all?"

"Sell him?" echoed Philip. "No, no! But I'll give him. I'll make an exchange, I mean to say."

"Go on, then. What will the exchange be?" asked the colonel, most of the brilliance of victory—whatever could have inspired it—disappearing at once from his glance.

"You help us with Jolly Delmar," said Philip. "Then I'll give you Loafer. I'll give you Loafer before, if you'll shake hands on the business!"

"You'll give your dog away for that?" asked the colonel, a shadow falling quickly over his face. "But I hear that you have no share in the mine?" he insisted.

"Oh, no," said Philip.

"Then why are you in it?"

"The Delmars are my friends."

"Friends?" cried the giant, and his voice fairly shook Philip with its thunder. "I know friends and friendships. I've never found them to wear. I've never found them to have any truth of substance. They don't last. Nothing in this world is given without pay. Nothing! What else do you want out of the Delmars? What can they give you? Tell me the truth!"

He reached out his hand, leaning from his chair, and caught the arm of Philip. He did not exert a great pressure, but Philip felt that he was hopelessly imprisoned, as though by the touch of unyielding iron.

"There's nothing else," said Philip, not quite honestly.

"There is—you lie to me," declared the colonel.

The point seemed to him of the vastest importance.

Then he sank back in the chair and nodded his head.

"It's the girl!" he exclaimed. And he nodded again. "Is that right?" he asked.

"I must not speak about it," said poor Philip.

"You must not? Speak about everything to me. I am a sea into which all secrets disappear. I am like conscience; I understand!" Then he added: "You have her for wife if you bring back Jolly Delmar? She promised you that?"

"She gave me no promise," answered Philip.

The colonel scowled blackly.

"I don't understand you," he said at last. "You had better go away. You annoy me. I don't understand. There's no promise made, and still you wish to

throw your life away? I don't understand. Go away, young man. I wish to be alone!"

Poor Philip stroked the head of Loafer. It was a comfort that the great dog was to stay with him, but it was a tiny comfort, after all. He said "Good-by" in the faintest of tones, but as he was turning away the voice of the giant flooded about his ears once more. "Come back!"

He returned and stood before the colonel.

"Look at me," said the big man, and Philip looked fairly into those wild, blue eyes.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA
THE RED-SHOULDERED HAWK
(Buteo Lineatus Lineatus)

BUTEO, meaning a buzzard, is of ancient origin, and *linea*, meaning a line, refers to the streaking of the plumage. This, the red-shouldered hawk, may be found in all parts of North America.

All the bad characteristics attributed to the hawk family are laid at the door of the Buteo, although he is really quite a valuable asset to the farmer. It is true that some hawks devour barnyard fowls, but it is equally true that all fowls which meet with an untimely death are not the victims of the red-shouldered hawk, as many believe. Often the scattered feathers of a chicken might be laid at the door of a fox, skunk, weasel, or cat, if proper investigation were possible. But, lacking real proof, the chicken-hawk, or hen-hawk, as it is often called, is blamed.

Not only the farmer, but also the hunter, is prejudiced against hawks. The rapidly disappearing game birds are believed to be common prey for this misunderstood creature.

Most of the hawks are heavy, deliberate fliers and seem fond of circling at great heights. When not in action they sit quietly on a dead limb for hours at a time, seeming to be oblivious to all that is going on around them, but the close observer will discover that they are very much alert and become aware of the slightest movement in their direction.

Examination of the stomachs of many of these red-shouldered hawks has revealed that their chief diet consists of field mice and insects, grasshoppers, and beetles, although occasionally a meal is made of frogs and, less oftener, a small bird. This analysis is really the most accurate method of discovering the regular diet, so it proves that this particular species is a benefit to the farmer rather than a menace, since insects and rodents do greater harm to his property than anything else.

It is quite common for the hawk to occupy the same nest year after year. This is usually built high up in a tree and two to four eggs are laid. In two weeks' time the young are just about able to sit up. The parent birds bring them food constantly, their hunger never seeming to be satisfied. If the delicacy is too large, the young birds themselves tear it apart and devour it. It has been observed that the weakest and smallest of a quartet of young hawks was eaten by its brothers and sisters to quell their clamoring appetite.

The birds are about five weeks old before they leave the nest, and they are then able to flap clumsily from tree to tree.

Music and Savage Beasts

By Roland Krebs
Author of "The Sax Appeal," etc.

ND here's a couple of packages for 'Shorty' Nolan, too," said the postmaster when "Red" Johns and I stopped off in town for the R Bar R's mail.

"What! Again?" I groaned.

What caused me to groan was that, as you may have caught me explaining before, Shorty Nolan is constantly and always blowing in his hard-earned dough on knickknacks he orders from a Chicago mail-order house.

"What is it this time—a self-starting and never-quitting Swiss music box, or a silo?" I asked.

"Can't say," the postmaster remarked, "but it's a right hefty package, the one is."

He shoved the bigger one across the counter and I saw he'd made no mistake about it being big. That package looked big enough to me to contain a spare wheel for a locomotive. The second package was small, and thin, and flat, as though it had a book in it.

"Listen, Al," said Red, who is a very direct-to-the-point guy, "I got matches in my pocket. Let's buy some gasoline and when we get out where the road is lonely let's open this package and see what it is. If it's something we think is a menace to the peaceful home life of our outfit, let's make a bonfire out of it."

Of course, I talked Red Johns out of that, sane as the idea was, because Uncle Sam's got a way of taking it up wrong when you tamper with other people's mail.

So, we waited till we got home to see what new atrocity our Mr. Nolan had bought, and we all but collapsed when we saw.

It was a cello he'd ordered—a big bull fiddle, if you don't know what a cello is.

"You don't mean to say you're going to scrape that portable garage around here, do you?" squawked "Biffalo" Bull, our oldest, toughest, and tobacco-chewingest puncher, who's reputed to have shot folks in the old days for much less than playing the horse fiddle around him.

"Certainly," Shorty answered grimly.

"The cello is a very, very, beautiful instrument."

"Before I go out behind the barn and shoot myself, tell me—are you one of these dudes which never took a lesson in his life?" Biff asked.

"I not only never took a lesson," the peewee bragged, "but I never even had a cello in my mitts before."

"Then all I hope is that you can't find no teacher," Biffalo announced.

"Here, look at this," said Shorty, opening the small package. "Here is a instruction book they give you free with the cello. It's so simple that even an idiot could understand it."

"Well, if a idiot really could understand it, I got hopes," Biffalo snorted. "It'll probably be away over your head."

For a half an hour Shorty studied the book. Then, when he felt he had the rough idea, he propped it up in front of him, got a scissors hold on the big fiddle, studied a diagram on the page before him, placed his fingers on the strings, and then drew the bow across.

Wu-rrrrrff!

Gosh, it sounded like a big bullfrog had got that off his chest.

Eeeeee-yeeeeeee!

I once saw a fox terrier get his tail caught in a mouse trap. He squealed just like Shorty's heavyweight fiddle did.

Oh, I'm telling you, my rodeo audience, it was awful! It was the by-golliest disturbance you ever listened to.

For thirty-five minutes he made it yowl, woof, and screech.

"Say, when are you going to knock off taking random scrapes at it and actually try to play a song?" "Hungry" Hosford asked.

"I been playing a song!" Shorty Nolan snapped indignantly. "You just been listening to 'Old Black Joe'."

"I-yi-yi-yi-yi! How poor 'Old Black Joe' has changed!" Bill Tell exclaimed out.

Biffalo Bull went into the bunk house, rummaged in a trunk for a few minutes, and then came outside again wearing a pair of ear muffs.

Well, sir, at every moment of spare time he had, Shorty played on that bull fiddle of his for a week and he liked to have drove us all crazy. Biffalo was all for taking it away from him and making kindling wood out of it. We gave up that idea though, because Hungry Hosford pointed out that just for spite Shorty might order another one and even a third.

After that first, horrible week, however, we thought we got a break. Shorty had to answer a call on the ranch-house phone and he laid his bow and dog house down on the ground while he answered. One of the wagon mules that was nibbling grass tufts near by suddenly took fright at a bee and plunged backward, stamping one hoof *smack-bang* through the back of the bull fiddle—hooray!

Everybody felt perfectly swell about it, of course, except Shorty, because there wasn't, as far as we knew, a bull fiddle repair shop anywhere in Montana.

For a while Shorty was fit to be caged, and then for a time he was ready to bust out crying. His instrument, as he called it, had an awful hole in its back and I guess you can imagine how fine that don't improve the tone any.

All of a sudden his mug brightened up, he grinned, and he said to me—to whom, for some reason or another, he comes running with all his troubles—"Al, I just bet you that that old Dutch carpenter, Fred Hesselburger, can patch this cello for me."

I hoped the old German couldn't, naturally, but said, "Maybe he can, Shorty."

I had to go into town just about then and Shorty rode along with me for company, taking his train-wrecked peace disturber along.

Old Fred was eating his lunch of rye bread and *leberwurst* when we got to his shop.

"Yes," he said, laying down his sandwich and looking at the fiddle, "I think I can fix him up good. I take some thin wood and some of this new glue I got here and put a patch in him."

Mr. Hesselburger went over to a work bench to get his overalls, and then Shorty and me heard him swear something frightful in German. At the same time we saw something streak through an open window as the Dutchman heaved a block of wood after it.

"*Was ist das fuer eine Wirthschaft!*" yelped Mr. Hesselburger, holding up the remains of his *leberwurst* sandwich. "That darned tomcat of Mrs. Marston's makes a home out of my shop, uses my overalls for a bed and, while I got my back turned talking to you gentlemen, he swipes and eats my sandwich. Three times a day I chase him out and always he comes back."

After cussing out the tomcat for a few minutes more, the old fellow gave Shorty's bull fiddle a careful east-and-west and told the half-pint to come back in four days and it would be all patched up.

Five minutes after we'd left his workshop we met Mrs. Marston, who owned the tomcat, walking up the street with her son, Edgar, a fat kid who is about twelve years old and a head taller than Shorty Nolan.

That's a pair for you, Mrs. Marston and Edgar! She pumps the organ in church, once tried to organize a Wednesday Music Club, raves about a composer named Brahms that she claims is a popular song writer—who, incidentally, I never have heard about before in spite of having been a vaudeville star once—and is hopeful of starting some kind of a local symphony orchestra some day.

Edgar is a Boy Scout. That kid wouldn't set foot outside of his mother's house without his Scout costume on and his first-aid field kit on his back any more than he'd go out without underwear and socks.

"Oh, dear Mr. Crews," exploded his mother, who's a gushy sort of a dame, "have you seen my Archie anywhere? He's been gone all morning."

"Who is Archie?" I asked her.

"That perfectly gorgeous cat of mine," she told me. "Surely you've seen and admired Archie many's the time. He's a dear."

So, I told her about her gorgeous Archie having swiped Fred Hesselburger's gorgeous sandwich and how Fred had shied a block of wood at him. I also told her how we come to be at Mr. Hesselburger's shop, and she swung around and looked at Shorty like she was discovering him all over again.

"Why, my dear Mr. Nolan! Do you play the cello?" she gushed.

"Oh, yes, a little," Shorty answered, picking up a stick and starting to whittle it with his pocketknife.

That was the truth. He should have told her he didn't play little enough.

"Oh, then you must come over to our church the minute you get your instrument back," she raved on, "and let me accompany you on the organ. I always have so hoped to have a violin and cello at our services."

"Sure I will," Shorty promised, flattered that in this world there was, after all, somebody that actually wanted him to play his dog kennel.

Just then I took out a pack of cigarettes and, with her permission, lit one.

"Say, Mr. Crews," Edgar piped up, "if you don't save 'em yourself, will you save me your cigar-store coupons? I'm saving up to get a 1200-foot beam flash light that would cost me five dollars otherwise. It might come in handy for night emergency work."

As I finished promising to save him the certificates, Shorty Nolan, who had been whittling all this time, let his knife

slip, and it cut a nice, deep gash in his finger.

Gee! You should have seen Edgar's eyes gleam.

"Here, sit right down here, Mr. Nolan," the kid said, shoving Shorty down to a rock. "Now, don't get excited, Mr. Nolan. Remember, in an emergency, always keep your head."

"What emergency are you talking about, Edgar?" the pop-eyed Shorty inquired dazedly.

"This wound," the Boy Scout explained, as he swung his kit off his back.

"Shucks! A cut finger? That ain't nothin'," Shorty told him, starting to get up.

Edgar pushed him back. "You can't tell what that might be," he argued. "Look at it bleed. Probably's an artery you cut. Liable to get a bad infection there. First I'll put a Spanish windlass on your arm to play safe while we see if it's an artery or not."

The kid took a small woodsman's ax from a holster at his belt and a big jackknife from his pocket. He snatched up a board that happened to be handy on the street and with his ax hacked a small piece of wood out, which he then whittled thin and scraped clean with his knife.

All this time Shorty was watching the little nut like it was a lunatic doing this for him.

I felt like Shorty about it—that it was a trifling cut he had in his finger—but I could see that this youngster was anxious to try out the first-aid stuff he'd been studying up on.

Edgar laid the flat piece of wood over the artery in Shorty's upper arm. Then he slipped a noose around it and the arm, shoved a stick into the noose and twisted it into a tourniquet.

"Now let me see that finger," Edgar said, ready to bust with importance. "H-e-m-m. Not as bad as I thought. Haven't touched the artery, Mr. Nolan. I'll give you a little antiseptic and you'll be as good as new."

From the kit he got out a bottle of tincture of iodine, a strip of gauze, and some adhesive tape. First he soused Shorty's cut with iodine, then he bound the wound up carefully with gauze and tape.

"There!" he said with a big grin, when he finished and stood up again. "I've done my daily kind deed." He gathered up his portable drug store and put his ax back into its holster.

"Isn't Edgar wonderful?" his daffy mother asked us.

What could we say? We said it!

"I'm lucky he didn't remove my tonsils before we got away," Shorty mumbled after we had parted with them, following his promise he'd be on hand for some practice as soon as Fred Hesselburger patched his cello.

Well, on the day the bull fiddle was to be pronounced cured, I had to go to town, and I made it a point to see that I went when Shorty did.

Just as we rode into town we met Mrs. Marston. She was bawling like her heart was busted.

"Oh, Mr. Crews! Mr. Nolan!" she sobbed. "Have you seen Archie anywhere? No? Oh, oh, oh! The poor little dear. He's been gone since that day you saw him last in Hesselburger's shop. I just know that that old Dutchman has killed him."

She yammered and snaffled some more and then wound up by saying to Shorty to go fetch his bull fiddle, for, even though she felt too badly about Archie for words, why, they'd practice after all. You know how us artists are, I guess.

Shorty Nolan and I went past the Dutchman's and found that the old fellow had put such a neat patch on the broken back that it seemed to squawk and squeal just as good as ever. About all the difference I could notice, maybe, was that the tone seemed to be just a

little bit more muffled, which was a good thing.

So, Shorty put the big fiddle into its case and we plunged on over to the church, where Mrs. Marston was sitting at the organ, waiting for us.

Shorty, before the mule put a hoof in his instrument, had been practicing on "Rock of Ages," and they decided to try that first.

The organ started to grunt and the cello to squawk and they seemed to be doing fine until suddenly a loud and sour note came out of the horse fiddle.

"Yah-OOOOOO-oooooo!" it went.

Mrs. Marston quit right there. "You should have played this note, Mr. Nolan," she said, pointing to the sheet of music.

"That's what I done," the peewee told her.

"You're mistaken!" She's one of these firm dames. "You played a sharp. Here; look at this music. Try to find that note."

"EE-YEEEE-eeeee!" That from the fiddle as Shorty scraped his bow.

"That's better, Mr. Nolan; let us begin from the beginning."

They made a fresh start and got to that same note. Instead of *EE-YEEEE-eeeee,* Shorty played another *Yah-OOOOO-ooooo,* it sounded to me like.

"Mr. Nolan! Can't you remember to finger that string right?" Mrs. Marston snapped.

Shorty laid his bow on a chair seat to mop his perspiring forehead.

Again, while the bow was out of his hand, the bull fiddle pealed out another *Yah-OOOO-ooooo,* just as though it was haunted.

I don't know which of the three of us stared at it with the poppiest pop-eyes.

There was another wail from the bull fiddle and, as Shorty let it fall out of his hands, we heard it go, *"Psssst! Psssssst! Fut! Pff-ffttttt!"*

Mrs. Marston went up to the cello timidly and stared into the little curlicue ventilator gizzicks in the front side of the body.

"Archie!" she screeched. "Archie! Honey, what are you doing in that cello?"

"Psssst! Psssssst! Pf-ffffffffttttt!" was all the answer Archie gave her.

"Mr. Nolan! Are you trying to be funny? Are you trying to make this practice a burlesque? Are you trying to make a fool of me? What do you mean by putting my cat inside your instrument?"

"I never put him in there, Mrs. Marston," Shorty told her weakly.

It suddenly dawned on me how Fred Hesselburger had complained about Archie visiting him all the time, swiping his *leberwurst* and picking out soft places for a bunk. I guessed that Archie had crawled inside the big musical dog house while the hole was still in its back, thinking it would make a nice, hide-away bunk, and that the Dutchman, not knowing the cat was inside, had closed up the opening and made the tomcat a prisoner.

So, I told Mrs. Marston that.

"Very well," she said, "but I want my cat released. Mr. Nolan, open up that cello immediately!"

"I can't; it ain't got any door or lid," Shorty wailed.

"Break it open!"

"No, sir! That's no cheap fiddle. I paid twenty-two dollars for it and five more for repairs."

"I insist that you release Archie!"

Mrs. Marston made a grab for the bull fiddle, but Shorty shoved it behind him and shoved her away.

"Don't you dare strike me!" she screeched.

Just then Edgar, the Boy Scout, with kit, ax and all, walked in and asked, "What's the matter, mom?"

"Edgar, honey, this man has my Archie in his cello and won't break it open to free the poor beast."

"Gimme that cello!" said Edgar, anx-

ious as a Boy Scout should be to aid a defenseless woman.

"You leave me be!" Shorty yelped back, and gave the big, fat kid a good shove.

Well, sir, Boy Scouts seem to know all kinds of card tricks. Among other capers up his sleeve for emergencies, Edgar knew a little about jujutsu—but that little was plenty. He grabbed Shorty's wrist, twitched it, and sprawled the little puncher on his back on the floor.

I was just about to step in and take a hand when I saw Edgar start to do something that made my heart almost burst with joy. He whipped his Boy Scout ax out of its holster and with a couple of whacks he just simply ruined that big cello.

As soon as Edgar had whacked a big enough opening, Archie skyrocketed out, turned a couple of handsprings, and went through a window with his tail puffed up like a bologna sausage.

"Mr. Nolan," said Edgar in a very manly fashion, as he helped Shorty to his feet, "I'm sorry I had to spill you on your ear. We Boy Scouts are taught to respect our elders, but we're also taught to protect women and be kind to animals. When you interfered with me doing my duty, I just had to be disrespectful and upset you."

I decided right here to take a hand. "Edgar," I said, "as a former Boy Scout myself, I'm proud of you. You sure did your kind deed to-day. It's such a big deed that you're caught up for life. You don't know how smashing that cello will make the R Bar R outfit happy. As an ex-Boy Scout, I want to do my daily kind deed. Saving up coupons for that flash light is too slow. You might need it in an emergency some night if you bumped into another cello. Here's a five-dollar bill. Buy that light right away."

Shorty, who always grins at the right time, grinned then. "Edgar," he laughed, "you did me a kind deed, too. I don't think I was cut out for a cello player. That cello has brought me nothing but bad luck and made nothing for me but enemies. I'm glad you smashed it. Here's another five. Buy two flash lights—one for each hand."

Shorty stuffed the bill into the astonished youngster's mitt, then dug a quarter out of his pocket and added it to the bill.

"What's this for?" Edgar asked.

"For Archie," Shorty explained. "Buy him a pint of cream."

THE DISAPPEARING MISTLETOE

WORD comes from Oklahoma that the mistletoe is fast disappearing from that State, due to its haunt among native timber being destroyed as the ground is cleared for agricultural purposes. This is sad news for the lovers of this beautiful and decorative plant, with its wealth of holiday associations.

Although the mistletoe is termed a parasite it is so only in part, says George Phillips, the State forester. The mistletoe manufactures most of its own food by means of chlorophyll contained in its green leaves and stems, but it damages its host, however, by starving the branch on which it grows.

The mistletoe is found on a great variety of trees, especially the apple tree, but seldom on the oak. It was consecrated to religious purposes by the ancient Celtic nations of Europe, and was held in peculiar veneration by the Druids, especially when found growing on the oak.

The mistletoe is found from New Jersey southwest to the Gulf of Mexico. Its sticky berries adhere to the feet of birds, and in this way it is spread from tree to tree. The plant was chosen as the State flower of Oklahoma.

Wasted Salt

By George Washington Ogden

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

COLIN CAMPBELL, unlucky and despised in his own part of the country, wins by chance, but also by real merit, a name for coolness and courage and a position as subeditor of the *Mirror*, in Medicine Grove. His reputation has grown so high that the sheriff appoints him his deputy to arrest a notorious local character of whom even hardened gunmen fight shy.

CHAPTER XXII.

A QUESTION IS DECIDED.

THERE was a portentous quietude around the square as Campbell set out for Lafe Garrett's saloon to make the arrest. While there was a holiday abandonment of business, there was none of the holiday spirit among the citizens who thronged the open space around the courthouse, many of them still carrying the arms with which they lately had made effective defense of their treasure. Some of these men walked about gravely in twos and threes, conversing in low tones; others stood bunched like cattle drawn together in a storm, heads thrust forward eagerly to catch the low-toned harangue of some central figure.

An air of repression, both vocal and physical, seemed to weigh upon them all. Expectation, rather than relief, stood in the eyes of every man who milled in apparent aimlessness around that side of the square where the courthouse shadow stretched out wide and long. Some looked curiously at Campbell as if wondering why he should go skirmishing for the news with two guns hanging on him and an official badge pinned to the pocket flap of his black-silk shirt. Some nodded, some spoke, and one stopped him to tell him that the blacksmith had died of his wound, but nobody asked him where he was going, or what business he had in hand.

Campbell noted a general movement of concentration among them, suddenly developed as the news of the blacksmith's death ran from man to man. It was a strange, almost startling, movement to note, much like water that has remained quiet on the surface while

the bottom drains away through an open bung and suddenly swirls in violent precipitation as its level falls. Still, Campbell did not believe there was any danger of a movement to take the prisoner away from the sheriff and hang him, as had been the fate of others of his kind at the hands of outraged citizens of that town in times past. They had outgrown such sudden and vindictive outbursts of temper, he believed, with men like Charles Pillow to hold them level.

Gus Rennick, and certain worthy spirits of his own valiant stamp, among them one of the barbers of whom Sid Stillwell had spoken with disparagement on a certain occasion, had gathered in Lafe Garrett's saloon after the strife of the historic hour. Garrett's joint was favored by Gus and others of deep capacity on account of the large tubs of "suds," as the tall beer glasses current in that day were called, which Garrett slung across his bar.

Gus was perfectly aware of what was going on outside. Things had not advanced far enough yet to be of especial interest to him, for he was a cautious man, of the kind who rushes in when the labors of others have brought matters to a climax and snatches off the distinction and the profit. He had no mind for running the risk of getting his hide dotted by a charge of shot from Sheriff Augerbright's gun, but let somebody else take the prisoner out of jail and march him off to the cottonwoods along the creek, and Gus would be there ready to put the rope around his neck and give it the heaviest pull of any man in town.

Just now Gus was contenting himself by striking a pose effected by leaning one strong arm on the bar, propping one heavy foot on the brass rail at the bottom of it—contrivance placed at the base of bars for the sole purpose of enabling barroom orators to assume attitudes, and for no other reason that any man, past or present, living or dead, ever has been able to advance—and giving his opinion in the matter of Colin Campbell's delinquency in the matter of Al Waddell's escape. Lafe Garrett himself was in line before the bar with his customers, taking ginger ale—his choice was always either that or a cigar—for Lafe had alcoholic beverages to sell, not to put down his own classic throat, even though somebody else stood the score, as now.

"He had him," said Gus; "he had him dead to rights, and he could 'a' plugged him from collar button to tail bone, but he let him walk out and hop his horse and git away. Why didn't he plug him? That's what I want somebody to tell me."

"Some men get buck ague when they're in a jam like that," the barber said wisely, like a diagnostician of established authority.

"Hard to account for a man's actions sometimes," Garrett remarked with the sneering soft insolence peculiar to him that was more derogative than Gus Rennick's windy criticism ever could be.

"Yes, and somebody'll have to show me the bullet from Campbell's gun before I'll believe he shot the feller that was makin' Waddy throw the money in the sack. I noticed two bullet holes in the winder, about man-high. Somebody on the outside got that feller, my opinion. I'm waitin' for the coroner to dig that bullet out of him before I say Campbell's the man to git the credit. Anyhow, if it was Campbell done it, nearly any boy in town could 'a' snook' in the back door and got the drop on them fellers.

"If Campbell killed one, why didn't he kill both of 'em? He sure had the bulge on 'em, but he let Waddell walk out. Something funny about that. And why didn't Waddell take a shot at

Campbell? Well, he didn't. If he had, Campbell'd be layin' on a board over there with the rest of 'em. Maybe there's something more between them two than anybody knows on the face—him makin' that play of goin' after Waddell and gittin' his money back off of him that time; Waddell comin' here and throwin' a bluff like he wanted to git Campbell, but couldn't because a darn fool girl was twistin' herself around him like a serpent. It wouldn't surprise me if them two fellers framed things all along."

"Nobody in this town don't know anything about him," the barber said, sour in the recollection of just one hair cut and one shave practiced on the subject of discussion during all his months in town.

"No, and it's about time somebody looked up his past," said Gus. "Well, I know one thing: if he ever gives me any slack, I'll paste him one—right where it'll do him the most good! I'll punch his ticket for him, and I'll show him where he gits off at, 'y garsh! I don't say much, but I'm a man that can——"

Just what kind of a man he was, nobody was to know, for just at that moment the soft-swinging wing doors opened, and Colin Campbell entered, his guns looking bigger to Gus than the old Civil War cannon out on the courthouse lawn. There was a general stiffening of spines along the bar, a show of nonchalance in reaching for glasses, a play at innocence which was a blanket disclaimer of any part in the late criticism.

Campbell advanced to the bar. His deputy sheriff's badge was bright against the black cloth of his shirt; the two heavy guns sagged low on his thighs. Lafe Garrett had been toying with a long, fresh cigar while Gus built up his case against Campbell. He raised it to his mouth now, as he turned to glance at Campbell indifferently, nodding, as he might nod to any casual customer.

"Hello, Campbell," he said.

Campbell had some sort of ungrounded notion that, in order to make an arrest by warrant effective, the body of the person under charge in the written instrument must be touched by the officer. He did not reply to Garrett's salutation, but stepped briskly forward, placed a hand on Garrett's shoulder, his demeanor confident and unshaken.

"I've got a warrant for your arrest, Garrett."

"Is that so?" said Garrett indifferently. He did not flinch under Campbell's hand, nor shift, nor move even an eyelid, as far as anybody saw. "Well, what're you goin' to do about it?"

"I'm going to take you along," Campbell replied.

He removed his hand from Garrett's shoulder, fell back a pace, motioning his prisoner toward the door.

Garrett did not move a muscle to obey the command to march. He stood, biting his cigar, his absurdly pouched neck craned forward in his usual manner. He turned his eyes with calculative survey of the situation, as if considering what prestige he would lose by going, or what assistance he might count on if he should refuse. The bartender was the only one of the employees of his house present; the games were standing covered over against the wall, the slug-headed pair who presided over them asleep. And the bartender was not a gun-handy person, his specialty being bung starters and stub ends of billiard cues.

"Run on back and tell Augerbright I'll drop in after a while and see what's bitin' him," Garrett said.

He was standing not more than a yard away from Campbell, pistol in his hip pocket, as Campbell plainly saw, his trim vest buttoned, the usual as-

sortment of animal teeth and claws swinging from his watch chain. He seemed comfortable, self-assured, and undisturbed by his challenge of the law.

"You're going with me now," Campbell said.

"You git out of here, or I'll throw you out on your ear!" Garrett burst out, his face flaming suddenly scarlet, his hand moving back toward the gun.

Campbell landed him a wallop on the side of the jaw that piled him in a wild flurry of legs against the bar. Before Garrett could claw out of it, Campbell grabbed him by the neck, set him on his feet, and hauled back to whale him another one. The first blow had been for the law; this one was for poor old Bill McCamish, whether living or dead at that moment Campbell did not know.

The second jolt made the glasses on the back bar dance. Campbell made a swoop to pick up Garrett's gun, which had fallen from his pocket the first time he went down. He rose up under the menace of the wooden mallet with which the strong-armed bartender drove bungs out of beer kegs and spigots into the holes. He snatched at the mallet, and got it; straightened up and whanged it hard at the bartender's head. It missed the man, but made a great commotion among the glassware behind him.

"Keep out of this!" Campbell warned him, and, as if that warning had not been sufficient, what the bartender saw in the door was plenty to induce him to observe neutrality from that moment forward.

The door was full of men, and their hands were full of guns. They came crowding into the saloon as Campbell hauled his prisoner up and leaned him against the bar, his long legs unsteady under him, his face crimson and battered out of all semblance to its ordinary pink neatness, for those two blows had been terrific, driven by a weight of vengeance that had been gathering long.

These citizens had seen Campbell enter Garrett's saloon, a thing they never had seen him do before. Not that he was above taking on a few drinks, as everybody knew. When he and McCamish wanted a drink, they always legged it around to the front of the courthouse to the more respectable place. Why Campbell should be going into Lafe Garrett's joint, when there was deadly enmity between them, with guns hanging on him, with a deputy sheriff's badge, and a look of solemn resolution on his face that many had noted as he passed, these men wondered—and followed to find out.

Gus had arrived at a conclusion, and had turned at once to meet the new conditions, like a windmill veering to face a breeze from another quarter. He was outside the door, pouring his purely imaginative story into the ears of eager listeners before Garrett was firm enough on his feet to travel. Gus was spreading word that McCamish had died, and that Campbell had arrested Garrett on a charge of murder. Gus also hinted, rather broadly, that Garrett ought to grace a limb for that atrocious deed, an opinion which met with instant and eager support.

By the time Campbell got Garrett headed for the door, this hostile sentiment had spread amazingly. The feeling toward Garrett had become one of sudden and complete revulsion; men who never had harbored a good thought or spoken a kind word for McCamish had become his eager avengers. When Garrett paused a moment in the door, he could not find a friendly face among them.

Garrett was a sorry figure, a crestfallen man. His nose was battered, his face was puffed and swollen, for he was out of condition, long unaccustomed to taking that kind of handling.

He pressed close to Campbell, afraid of what he saw. But there was something of his old insolence in him yet as he spoke.

"You didn't need to bring the whole town along, Campbell," he said.

"They're after your friend in jail, not you," Campbell replied.

It was an injudicious taunt, Campbell quickly realized. Those near him snatched at the words like greedy boys at unguarded fruit. An old-timer, known to Campbell by sight but not by name, pressed forward. He carried a muzzle-loading, single-barrel shotgun under his arm, and there was a look of sternness about him almost fanatic.

"Is he hooked up with Waddell's gang?" he asked.

Campbell did not reply. He took Garrett's arm and urged him forward, eager to get on before they became too insistent for information and blocked the way.

"Hit it up, Garrett!" he said, speaking little above a whisper, striking a fast pace.

The old man with the shotgun was not to be shaken off that way. He fell in beside Campbell, glaring at him savagely for this attempt to evade and ignore a pointed inquiry.

"I asked you if he was one of 'em, Campbell," he said.

Before Campbell could answer, Jess Henshaw, the county attorney, stepped out of the crowd with a hot air of outraged authority about him, and stopped the hasty march toward the jail.

"What the heck do you think you're doin', Campbell?" he demanded, his dull eyes scowling malevolently. "Who gave you authority to go around arrestin' anybody? I never issued a warrant for this man—where's your authority?"

"He's arrested, authority or not," Campbell replied.

"Let him go!" Henshaw ordered with peremptory roughness.

"He's going to jail, Henshaw," Campbell warned, making a start forward, his grip tight on Garrett's arm.

"Don't pull a gun on me, darn you!" said Henshaw, jumping back and aside as if his life were threatened.

Campbell recalled that he was carrying Garrett's gun in his hand. He shoved it in his hip pocket with such haste that it appeared to the crowd as if Henshaw had cowed him.

"I wasn't pulling a gun on you, Henshaw; I'd forgot I had it in my hand. Come on, Garrett."

"Turn that man loose!" Henshaw blustered.

"I started to take him to jail, Henshaw, and I'm going to do it. Don't try to stop me."

"Yes, by gum! You'll be in jail yourself or I'll know the reason why! Who bunged you up that way, Garrett?"

"I asked him for his authority, same as you're doin'," Garrett replied resentfully, as if he blamed Henshaw for allowing a thing like this to be put over on both of them, which he probably did.

Some of the citizens pressing around the three men laughed at Garrett's explanation, but most of them were past laughing at anything involving Lafe Garrett, whose flouting of decency in many directions, and brutal attack on McCamish above all, had placed him under a general cloud of disfavor.

"Go on back to your business," Henshaw directed him. "We'll take this matter up later."

As Henshaw spoke, and Garrett picked up with an insolent leer to act on his instructions, Campbell shifted behind his prisoner, his right hand free for action. He clapped Garrett on the shoulder with his left hand, nailing him in his tracks.

"He's going to jail, Henshaw," Campbell told the attorney. "If you interfere, I'll treat you exactly as I'd treat anybody else."

"You fool! Don't you know you're liable to go to the pen for this?" Henshaw snarled. "You can't strut around this county playin' sheriff without warrant of authority or law."

"I'm a sworn deputy sheriff," Campbell replied. "If you want the reason for this man's arrest, I'll give it to you. That kid member of Waddell's gang over in jail has been tellin' things. This is the man that tipped off the information to Waddell that twelve thousand dollars of the county money was brought back here day before yesterday from Wichita and deposited in the bank. I don't suppose many people outside the courthouse ring knew the money ever had been out of the county. But Garrett did."

"The-e-e skunk!" somebody said.

Henshaw's face paled. He shot a quick look at Garrett, in which question and denunciation were curiously blended, much as a lawyer might turn on a client in whose defense he had labored hard, only to have all undone by some inadvertent admission or unadvised act.

Campbell pushed Garrett forward roughly.

"Hit it up!" he said.

Garrett wrenched from under Campbell's hand and turned appealingly to his friend. Henshaw was backing off into the crowd.

"You'll have to explain this, Garrett," he said.

"You're dead right he will!" somebody declared.

The crowd opened reluctantly, making a passage for Campbell and the prisoner, and closed behind them like water. Campbell was not above two rods from Garrett's door, in the middle of the broad main street, the farther margin of which was the courthouse lawn, edged by its railing of hitching poles. It was fully a hundred yards to the jail, and Campbell began to have qualms about getting his prisoner there, for he heard a movement of feet behind him, and almost at once men began to pass, dividing around prisoner and deputy, falling into grim and threatening step beside the hastening pair.

Garrett was entirely awake to his precarious situation. His breath was coming short; a tremor of panic was running through him; Campbell could feel him shiver under his hand. He began to trot, in a bigger hurry to get to jail than he ever had thought he would be in his life. Campbell checked him, fearing an undue show of panic or haste would break the restraint of the crowd. A rush would submerge them, and Campbell felt that, come what might, he could not pull a gun and shoot ordinarily law-abiding citizens to save the life of that miserable scamp.

"Take it easy, Garrett—walk slow," Campbell whispered. He checked his prisoner's increasing gait with hand on his sloping shoulder.

There was no sound from the crowd but the noise of feet in the unpaved, dusty street, not a word, not even a whisper that Campbell could hear. He regretted that Henshaw's arrogant challenge of his authority had made it necessary to disclose the nature of the charge lodged against Garrett. Now these men appeared to have reached a decision in his case—jurors at large, it might be said, they were—and to be waiting only a little more aggravation, to take the matter of punishment into their own hands.

A show of weakness, a display of fright that would disclose knowledge of the impending peril, would be almost certain to precipitate a charge. Campbell hoped fervently that he could keep a calm outward appearance, march his prisoner along easily until he drew opposite the courthouse. Then a quick turn to the right, a dash for the sheriff's door.

Over and over he rehearsed that final dash, Garrett ahead of him, the flanking wings of the crowd closing around to cut them off. A scrimmage, maybe; a scramble, skinned knuckles, blows given and taken, perhaps, at the end. But he must not, could not, pull a gun against his neighbors and friends to save the life of that execrable worm.

They had passed Pillow's store, and were almost opposite the sheriff's office. Here a break in the line of hitching poles offered, and Campbell concluded that it would be a good move to make a diagonal cut across the lawn, thus shortening the distance by a few yards. He touched Garrett's shoulder, nodding toward the break in the fence-like convenience which lined the square.

Garrett was already strained to the point of breaking. At the touch and the signal, he leaped away in a desperate, frantic run. It was the opening for which the crowd had watched; the one little break in the guard of officer over prisoner for which these grim citizens had waited to thrust in a blow. Instantly they filled the yard's space between Campbell and his prisoner. Garrett squealed like a horse in the despairing terror of their touch as they swarmed over him and bore him to the ground.

Campbell found himself almost instantly alone, a stranded, empty-handed feeling about him that was dazing in its suddenness. He was separated from his charge by several yards, nobody was paying the slightest attention to him. Garrett was on his feet again, fighting against hopeless odds to free himself, his fists flashing wildly, kicking and lunging in his effort to get back under Campbell's protection.

They caught his hands and held him, writhing and squirming like the serpent that he was, to slip away and run, and run, in the wild abandonment of fear. A young man ran to a horse hitched near by and began to untie the coiled rope that hung at the saddle horn.

Campbell still stood where he had stopped, unable to decide for the moment whether to interfere or abandon the wretched man to the vengeance of the mob. He thought that if poetic justice ever overwhelmed a man in this world, it had descended on Lafe Garrett. The young man returned running with the rope; they were winding it around Garrett's body, binding his hands to his sides, wrapping him like an insect in a spider's web.

He had only to keep his hands off, Campbell knew, let them carry out their unmistakable program, to see Bill McCamish terribly and completely avenged. They were over against the courthouse wall, where Garrett had rushed and now plunged, and struggled, and fought, with strength multiplied in his soft muscles and sloping, useless shoulders. Campbell was quite alone on the edge of the crowd. He could slip away and abandon Garrett to his deserved end, and who would there be to charge that he had not done his best to preserve him to the judgment of the law?

As this thought passed through his mind, quickly as the shifting postures of that rapidly moving scene, Campbell saw Charles Pillow standing before his door, his great beard spread serenely on his breast. He seemed, standing there in the bright sunlight of the declining day, to exemplify the calm, dignified spirit of the community; the responsible, stable, respectable division of society which would expect more of its defenders than the surrender of even a felon to the inflamed fury of a mob. Campbell felt the rebuke of the tall, dignified presence. A flush of shame for his treasonable delinquency burned hot in his lean face and deepened the brand of the outlaw's bullet across his cheek. He bowed his neck,

gathered his shoulders, and bored headlong into the crowd.

It was a terrific fight—bare fists against hard heads, against gun stocks interposed to check his charge; against yells and warnings, and cries of "Keep out of this, Campbell!" shouted hoarsely over his head as he battered and plunged to win to the side of the abandoned prisoner. He clenched in back-cracking wrestlings and fought breast to breast with hairy, great-boned men whose breath was hot in his face, whose strength was increased in their limbs by the frenzy of their lawless desires.

But there was the restraint of friendly consideration on both sides in that fight. They were his neighbors; he could not flash a gun in their faces to save the life of that unworthy man; he was one of them, they could not crack his head with a pistol butt to stop him in his determined effort to enforce his sworn duty. So they piled on him, and submerged him, and smothered the breath out of him under the weight of their bodies, there on the green grass of the courthouse lawn.

Then Campbell realized that nothing but guns would answer. Elbows pinned against his ribs with the weight of them sprawling and kicking to hold him down, he managed to get hold of and draw a gun. He prodded them with it, and they rolled off and jumped up, and yelled with strident trepidation to look out for that gun—he's got a gun—watch out!

And Campbell was up in the swirl of a tipping and uncertain world. He felt bent out of shape and disjointed; his head was buzzing; blood was pouring out of his nose and from cuts on his severely beaten face; but he flashed out his other gun and went weaving and staggering forward to his prisoner, and no man stood before him to question the sincerity of his desperate resolution.

Garrett had backed into an angle of the courthouse wall, where he leaned distracted in the agony of terror, so weak from his rough handling and the fright which racked his bones that he could hardly stand. Campbell posted himself in front of the quaking villain, crowding him back into the shallow corner as far as he could go. He faced the crowd, his two guns in his hands, battered, but grim and determined beyond the doubt of any man.

Campbell had turned the balance of the situation so quickly that the crowd hardly realized that Garrett was out of their hands, although they could have prevented the rescue—as many of them knew, as Campbell realized—if that friendly consideration for a neighbor whose valor was now pretty well proved, had not prevailed. Now it was too late; Campbell had gone after his guns, and there was not a man among them, including Gus Rennick, who had the faintest doubt that he would shoot. There was something in his battered visage that looked bad for them just then, and they backed off, and let him alone.

Charles Pillow came down from his platform and spoke to them, making his way among them over to Campbell. Sheriff Augerbright appeared on the steps in front of his office door that moment, shotgun in his hands, making it easy for the assembled citizens to come to the conclusion that there would be no lynching in Medicine Grove that day.

But there was no doubt in anybody's mind any longer that Colin Campbell would fight, given sufficient reason and within the law. Men who had scoffed at Bill McCamish's judgment in picking that long-legged, horse-faced, sandy-haired farmer for editorial bouncer were very quiet on the subject of his fitness for the job just then. They would speak carefully on the subject of Colin Campbell's valor thence-

forward, and if they did not walk humbly in his presence, they would walk at least circumspectly, guarding their winks and jests when he passed around the courthouse square.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CASE FOR THE CORONER.

IT took more than that to kill a Kansas editor, said Bill McCamish; much, much more, indeed. But people thought surely not a great deal more, when they saw him come forth from his confinement looking white as a grub that has been torn from its sheath long before its appointed time. At the best he could do, he was more than a month absent from his desk, his first excursion abroad being a trip to the courthouse to give testimony which sent Lafe Garrett to the penitentiary.

The State failed to make a case against Garrett on the complicity in robbery charge, the county attorney holding the word of a felon insufficient. At any rate, Medicine Grove was purged of Garrett's presence, his noisesome joint was closed, and McCamish said that was worth the price he had paid.

All this commotion had overshadowed and crowded out of both the *Mirror* and public thought another event of civic interest and pride—the great musical contest between the sheriff and the city marshal. When McCamish got on his feet, he took the enterprise over with all his natural enthusiasm, for he felt that some comedy relief was due the public to offset the depression of so much tragedy. Sid Stilwell's foot had been slow to heal, and was still tender, although it bore his weight well enough for clipping and shaving his customers, upon whose chests he could more or less ease his weight with his elbow as he operated the razor.

Sid protested that nothing could be done until that foot was entirely well. That was his patting foot; it would be impossible to put the proper spirit into a piece of music without its hearty and comfortable coöperation. McCamish said certainly, a virtuoso with either a stiff neck or a lame patting foot would be under such restraint of artistic expression as to render his music little better than any common fiddler's. For the credit of his reputation and the honor of the city, Sid's foot must be given time to heal and grow tough as a camel's pad, so that he might put all his original expression into the music of that momentous event.

McCamish suggested a date in September, to which Sid agreed. Sheriff Augerbright concurred in the appointment, saying he would have all his convicted prisoners in the penitentiary by that time, the worry of their presence off his mind. The sheriff always considered a man peculiarly dangerous after he had been convicted of a crime. No matter to what extent of sociability he had engaged with the prisoner before conviction, the sheriff invariably withdrew inside a shell of suspicion and distrust after an adverse verdict in the accused man's case. He looked on him then with stern countenance, and gave him short, gruff words.

McCamish was happy as a hornet over the arrangement. He engaged the Methodist church for the big event, overcoming the pastor's aversion to those instruments of Satan, large and small, by some kind of persuasion secret to himself, and he went grinning around in anticipation of the forthcoming musical spree as if he considered himself a public benefactor.

The Widow Ridley seemed still firm in her purpose of marrying one or the other of the peace officers, and the story went abroad, with what foundation of truth nobody knew, that she had determined to conclude the rivalry by taking the winner of the fiddling

contest. It was a delicate personal affair upon which McCamish would not permit his reporter to question her, an interdiction which did not extend to the other principals in the case. Not for publication, Campbell assured them, but for his personal gratification. Was the widow going to marry the winner?

Sid chewed his tobacco grimly, and set his heavy brows in stubborn refusal to commit himself. Wait and see, he said, but he said it portentously, like a man who had inside information. The sheriff chuckled, full of merry confidence, but was likewise discreet. There was no fool like a talkative fool, he said.

It was then late in July, with plenty of time for things to happen in both love and war before the long-standing rivalry should be fiddled off. On his round after the last stray bits of news before closing the forms for that week, Campbell stopped in to see if anything had lodged in Sid Stilwell's shop. Sid was glooming in his corner, quite a mulching of black, gray, grizzly, and red hairs around his barbering chair, his habit being to sweep up only at the close of the business day. His apron was tucked up, as he invariably hitched it before sitting down to take his ease, and he wore a look of displeasure which amounted almost to worriment on his roan-stubbled face.

No, he didn't have any news, and he didn't know as he'd give it to him if he had. Not on his account, he unbent to explain to Campbell, but by reason of a well-grounded animosity for McCamish. Campbell inquired, with unfeigned surprise, the reason for this sudden enmity toward a man who had proved, on many occasions, that he was the friend and champion of the gifted barber.

"Double crossin' me, Colly," Sid replied sorrowfully, with deeply injured air.

"Double crossin' your neck! What do you mean, double crossin' you?"

"Takin' up with that feller agin' me," said Sid, jerking his thumb toward the courthouse. "He's learnin' that blame' old cow another tune."

"Why, he couldn't teach anybody a tune," Campbell discounted the charge. "He can't even whistle one."

"Maybe he can't," said Sid resentfully, "but he can put him up to it, and he can send off to Kansas City and git him the music notes to it, and stand it up before his old hog eyes, and egg him on to learn it. Ye-e-s, he did! I got it straight. Sam Cole said it come by mail last Saturday. He handled it himself."

"Oh, well, that don't prove anything, Sid."

"Maybe not, but I've got ears; I've been hearin' a new kind of rumblin' and groanin' over there of nights. It ain't 'Old Aunt Rhody.' He hits a line or two now and then that sounds a little like a tune, but it ain't no tune I ever heard before. I didn't think it was in that big bull-sided slob to learn another tune, but I believe he's a-doin' it, egged on by that underhanded little sneak that pretends to be my friend."

"But even if he is teaching Augerbright another tune, Sid, what of it? I can't see where there's any advantage over you if he learns two new tunes. You must know a hundred of 'em."

"That ain't the point. The point is, everybody thinks of Augerbright as a one-tune man. If he learns another one, they're liable to give him the decision, not because they believe he's a better musicianer than I am, but because he done what nobody ever thought he *could* do. It'd surprise 'em so they'd just about raise up unanimous and give him the decision."

"I don't look at it that way, Sid, and I don't believe Bill McCamish has any interest in it but a kind of pity,

maybe, for John. I think Bill's a little bit ashamed, for the honor of the town, to have him get up there and play 'Old Aunt Rhody,' and nothing else but that one tune."

"Why didn't he give him something in the line of gospel hymns and sacred songs, then? It's comin' off in a church; I'm aimin' to give 'em a couple of them old-time religious tunes. No, that wouldn't do for Bill McCamish; he'd have to dig around and git him some dern foreign tune nobody ever heard; I guess because he knew dang well Augerbright never could learn to play it right, and nobody'd know the difference, anyhow. If he hits it in spots and noses out some kind of a noise that'll go for a tune here and there, it'll git 'em. They'll think he's the greatest artist that ever put rosum on a bow."

Campbell hoped Sid's fears were justified. He thought of writing something smart about the mystery of Augerbright's rehearsals, but dismissed it, fearing McCamish would not approve. He left Sid glooming over this unexpected development which, if public gossip had any foundation, was likely to cost him the widow's hand and fortune. Between the two, Campbell could not help favoring the sheriff, thick-skinned and ridiculous as he was, for there was a streak of geniality and genuineness in the fat old rascal which overbalanced his crudities.

Thinking of the sheriff this way, Campbell was given a start, almost a shock, as he rounded the corner of the courthouse and looked in the direction of that official's door, toward which he was setting his course. A tall claybank horse was hitched at the rack in front of the sheriff's office, sweat-streaked and dusty as if it had been ridden hard. Campbell did not believe there were two horses of that complexion near enough together for one ever to invade the territory of the other. He was certain that it was the horse Al Waddell had stolen from "Gip" Lott and ridden the day of his raid upon the bank. For a moment he felt an apprehensive dread of trouble, thinking Waddell had come back to even his score against the town. This he dismissed when he noted the horse standing alone, none other near it. He hastened on with a queer feeling of incredulous curiosity as he realized what he had seen.

There was no doubt about the horse, now that he was near enough to see the brand, a big G inclosing the letter L, a device fashioned and contrived by Gip Lott's own master hand, and duly registered by him in accordance with the law, although it had never been applied to the skin of another animal. Gip always explained that it was a distinction reserved for old Dan Boone alone.

Campbell paused a moment to look the animal over, his astonishment being so great that he could not at first credit his eyes. Beyond question, it was Dan Boone. Could Waddell have ridden in to surrender? No, that was not to be expected of Waddell. He must have traded or sold the horse, and the innocent purchaser had come riding there in all security.

Campbell hurried to the sheriff's door, intent on reporting the presence of the horse and laying claim to it in Gip Lott's name as stolen property. As he burst breathlessly into the sheriff's presence, he came face to face with no less notable a man than Gip Lott himself, his noble chin shining in the dignity of a late shave, his side whiskers flaring as importantly as any pair of whiskers that ever graced the face of diplomat, emperor, czar or pill peddler anywhere between the poles.

The two old friends rushed at each other with explosive salutations, and shook hands, and clapped shoulders, and exclaimed and wondered, Sheriff Augerbright standing by, beaming on

them like a benefactor who had contrived it all.

"You old scoundrel!" Campbell exclaimed admiringly, looking Gip over from shining, new top boots to hard little egg-shell hat, the mystery of the horse forgotten for the moment in his gratification at meeting the old-timer of the trails.

Gip glowed like a hot stove lid, his big chin red with pleasure, his happy eyes twinkling like pools in the sun.

"Slicked up like a bridegroom, ain't I?" he laughed. "Well, you've changed some yourself since you hit this town, Colly, you-u-u—sure—have—changed!"

"But how about Dan Boone?" Colly inquired, suddenly remembering.

"He's out there," said Gip, nodding toward the door.

"He's just been telling me about it," the sheriff said.

"And I came lopin' in here to lay claim to him in your name," said Colly. "How come you've got him back?"

Gip looked a bit thoughtful, turning his gaze downward to the floor, as if he had to recall the incidents leading up to the repossession of Dan Boone. His face was serious, the laughter was gone out of his friendly eyes.

"Well, sir," he said, "him and me met down across the line a mile or so this morning, as I knew we was bound to meet one of these days, sooner or later, if we lived long enough. I knew him at the first look, even without old Dan Boone, and he knew me, 'spite of my new clothes and my medicine wagon. He pulled, and I pulled; and I'm here, and he's down there."

As far as Gip could see, that was all there was to it. Sheriff Augerbright was putting on his hat.

"Even if he is across the line, I'll stretch my jurisdiction a mile or two and go after him," he announced. "I'll be ready as soon as I get the coroner and the undertaker. You want to go along, Colly?"

Yes, Colly wanted to go along, as a matter of duty to his paper, if nothing else. Joe Hendry saddled a horse for him, and he and Gip rode ahead of the wagon carrying the sheriff, coroner, and undertaker. Gip wanted to tell about his business with pain killer and pills, but Colly wanted the news. Gip said he didn't think a little shootin' match like that deserved much room in the paper, but it might help the sale of his goods, especially if Colly could get a few words in concerning the efficacy of Doctor Lott's famous Roup and Cholera Cure. Roup and cholera were prevalent among poultry that summer, Gip said; the ravages of those ailments were cutting down many a woman's grocery money, and it was nothing more or less than a plain humanitarian matter to help them along by putting his infallible remedy into their hands. Colly said all right, he'd do all he could for both the benefactor and the beneficiaries, but how did that shooting happen?

"Well, sir," said Gip, "he had a girl down there, and I knew he'd be back sooner or later to see if anybody'd cut him out. I guess he run down in the Nation some distance after that shootin' up here, but he come back, as I figgered he would, and him and me met a mile, or mile and a quarter, across the line this morning. He pulled, and I pulled; and I'm here, and he's there. You know, Colly that's the best roup and cholera medicine in the world. I'm not tellin' you it is simply because I make and sell it, but because it's been tried out——"

"There's a reward of three hundred dollars offered by the State for Waddell, dead or alive," Colly said.

"That so?" said Gip, picking up a little.

"And two hundred offered by the bank at Medicine Grove. It looks like you——"

"Two hundred, huh? I guess that's

all Marshall figgers a man's life is worth. His old cashier feller killed, and him postin' two hundred dollars for the man that done it. Well, I don't know as I'd want to touch his money."

"The railroad offered a thousand dollars for Waddell some time ago, but I don't believe it stipulated whether dead or alive. Maybe they'd back down if you couldn't walk him into their offices to prove you had him."

"They sure would," Gip declared. "I knew a brakeman up at McPherson one time that got his leg cut off under a train, but the company wouldn't pay him no damages because he couldn't produce the cut-off piece at the trial. They said how did they know he ever had a whole leg on that side. I don't know whether he was ever able to prove it or not. Last time I saw him he was so danged dazed by all they'd argued about him in court he was in doubt himself."

"Maybe it wouldn't be worth going after, then."

"No, Colly, it wouldn't. If they want to come up and plank the cash money down before me on the table, all right, but I'm not goin' to wear out any boot leather, chasin' it. I've got old Dan Boone back; that's all I want."

"How do you suppose Waddell came to keep him so long, Gip?"

"For one thing, he kep' him because he can outtravel any horse between here and Mexico; and, for another thing, he kep' him because nobody wouldn't trade for him or buy him off of his hands. Old Dan Boone he's too well known—known for a hundred miles down in the Nation. Nobody down in that country would want to take over a horse that'd been stole from me. Not that I've got any name and fame down in that country, Colly. I ain't got any name or fame anywhere." Gip spoke sadly, his look fixed on the dusty road. "But I'm a-makin' a name and fame," he said brightly, hopefully, looking up with great animation on his broad chin, in his wind-rustled side whiskers, in his merry eyes. "I'm workin' out a liniment for the bone spavin that's goin' to be a ringer. It'll make me fifty thousand dollars in the next five years."

"Well, here's hopin', Gip. Have you been up in my old neighborhood lately?"

"No, Colly, I ain't, but I'm aimin' to head up that way before long. I've been workin' over in Barber County, doin' more business than a flea ketcher, but I thought I'd head up north and give the old neighbors the benefit of my remedies. You thinkin' of goin' back to the old place?"

"I may go up there one of these days to look around; not to stay."

"No, I don't suppose you ever would, Colly. You're town-broke now; you'll stand hitched in Medicine Grove. Well, here's where I left that feller. I told 'em to leave him lay the way he was till the sheriff got here, but you can't tell what these half-breed Indians around here will do. No, I guess he's there, all right."

Gip's gaudy medicine wagon was standing in front of a log house smothered under low-branched elm trees, a little patch of corn on one side of it, a little patch of cane on the other. Al Waddell lay in the road where he had fallen, almost in front of the "gap," as a break in a fence was called in that country, through which he was riding when Gip encountered him. Two dark young men with long greasy hair were standing by, holding the horses upon which they had arrived; an old Indian was sitting on the fence, smoking indifferently, and two women, one young and comely, were shrinking among the tall horse weeds behind him. That was all the pomp and circumstance attending the exit of Al Waddell.

The undertaker loaded the remains,

as Gip spoke of Waddell's empty case, into his wagon, and the party returned to Medicine Grove, where a coroner's jury "sat" on the body in due and ancient form. After hearing Gip's story, the jury gravely and solemnly reached the conclusion that Waddell had fallen at the hands of the chief and only witness, who had acted within his rights and the law, and deserved the commendation of all honest citizens, wherever found.

But Gip would have nothing to do with the reward. Give it to some widder woman, he said; he had an aversion to money that had the color of human blood on it, even blood of the man who had robbed him of his horse.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN EDITORIAL PLEASANTRY.

THIS last visit of Al Waddell caused a little flurry in Medicine Grove for a day, then they buried him in an obscure corner of the cemetery with a piece of railroad tie at his head. Not out of any sentiment or respectful consideration was his last lodgment thus marked, but because people thought it unlucky to walk on a grave.

Waddell removed from his pestiferous interference with the legally restrained activities of men, Medicine Grove squared off to a renewed and growing interest in the approaching contest between the musical rivals of the town. Colin Campbell wore his elbow raw, writing weekly reports of the contestants' preparations, of the public interest—which he sought with carefully concealed humor to inflame—and suspense. His efforts had succeeded so well that the public was divided in its championship by a line as plain and as broad as Main Street itself.

More than that: between Campbell's reports, their grave exaggerations cleverly masked as unsophisticated country journalism, and McCamish's piquant editorial comments, the forthcoming contest of big fiddle against little fiddle in Medicine Grove had become a matter of interest not alone State-wide. Kansas City and St. Louis were reading of it; echoes of the remarkable event were reaching Chicago, Buffalo, Philadelphia. The *Mirror* was receiving more publicity through its promotion of the contest than any country paper in Kansas ever had enjoyed before. McCamish strutted about with a feeling that he must have enlarged in keeping with his paper's fame, although he was as lean as ever in his life, his big-waisted black trousers were as loose around his body as if he had ordered them in anticipation of a banquet which he never had enjoyed.

As the eventful day approached, suspense palpitated over Medicine Grove. The fiddling contest overshadowed politics; it obscured the tariff; free silver had become only a distant echo; the principles of Populism were put by like umbrellas in dry weather. The subject transcended even theology, and all other earthly controversies. Every heated partisan of the contestants believed that on the appointed day his fiddler would rise in triumph over the other one, and march off with the Widow Ridley and the sixty thousand dollars in cash and bonds she was reputed to possess, exclusive of the green house with its turret, and the broad lands lying all around.

These partisans collected in the square at night and argued it over, but not out; and listened with stilled breaths to Sid Stilwell playing in the rooms behind the barber shop, where he sat with shoes off to ease his feet, and the droning of Sheriff Augerbright in the courthouse, and they nodded, and said dang, listen to that, will you! Sid confined himself to sentimental airs mainly in those days, and his friends and champions knew it was

because he was eaten hollow by love. John Augerbright's big fiddle hummed dimly away behind closed doors, where he played with slow and solemn movement of the arm, ponderous punctuation of the foot, firm affixation of the jaw. Now and then out of that far-off, fragmental cacophony, people could pick up the trend of a tune, and that melody almost always was:

> "Go-o-o-o tell Aunt Rho-dy,
> Go-o tell Aunt Rho-o-dy,
> Go tell Aunt Rho-dy
> Her old gray goose is de-a-a-a-ad."

That was not much of a tune to go wooing a widow on, sneered Sid Stilwell's friends. It was not so much the tune, Augerbright's supporters retorted loftily, as the vehicle upon which it was produced. Nobody ever expected any living genius to get a tune out of that kind of a fiddle. Its place in the household of music was off in a corner, growling out the deep notes, beating the time with its grunting voice like a goosehorn in a band. It called for more than merely a genius to make that fiddle sing a tune; it demanded an Augerbright, and Medicine Grove had produced him.

Sid's clan professed disdain of the sheriff's musical pretensions. Let him saw away till his arm was sore, they said. That the neighbors didn't get up a crowd some night and lynch him spoke mighty well for their Christian forbearance. The sheriff's music was a delusion of simplicity. One could forgive such execrable rasping in a child, but in a man past fifty it was only ridiculous.

Through all this acclaim of his excellent parts, Sid was somewhat off his digestion, not altogether easy and at rest. His mind was disturbed over the matter of Augerbright's new tune. If the ponderous old humbug should succeed in enlarging his repertory beyond what Medicine Grove believed to be the bounds of human possibility with that cumbersome fiddle, Augerbright would win the laurels of all their contentious years. As a consequence of this uneasiness, Sid strained and listended for the notes of the new air he believed he once had heard. Night after night he put down his fiddle to stroll around the square and stretch his ears for the sound of that new tune.

If there was no moaning of the big fiddle singing the requiem of Aunt Rhody's goose in the rooms above the jail, Sid's heart would go climbing the ladder of his ribs in gusty panic. At such times he believed the old scoundrel had gone to the cell room in the basement to practice the new melody; if the sound of Aunt Rhody came groaning through the walls, Sid would hang around until the long torture of it ended, in the belief that it was a subterfuge to keep him in the dark.

On the other side, in spite of his accomplishments, Augerbright was not a happy man. He knew that the female ear was kindly inclined to the barbaric note of the accordion, and that Sid lately had taken up that instrument. Even though the big fiddle might win over the little one in public competition, who could tell what a widow would do when wooed by the strains of that beguiling instrument of bellows and many keys? Suppose Sid should come out one of these days proficient in the intricacies of the accordion, a doubly accomplished man? Then farewell circumstance, nice little widow, bonds, money, green-painted mansion, and several productive farms! It cost the fat sheriff many a sigh.

In that manner, each with one eye and ear constantly on his rival, the rest of his attention centered on his own perfections, these two notable musicians hurried on to the crisis of their years-old competition. And the Widow Ridley went smiling around, happy as a fat little hen. Everybody,

male and female, pulled for their particular champion in her graces, and Campbell and McCamish, diabolical instigators of this plot to show off the two old simpletons in all their unconscious comicality, sat in the newspaper office and laughed over it until their midriffs cramped, and passed the exchanges from hand to hand with many a proud word for the wide fame the *Mirror* and Medicine Grove had come to enjoy through their subtle plotting.

All doors and windows of the Methodist church were thrown open on the night of the contest, only a little dot of the big gathering of people being able to get inside. The county fair never had drawn so many people in a single day as came from far and near to hear and see this historic struggle of big fiddle against little one in the hands of these two locally notable men.

It was a hot, still night in early September; vast squadrons of those brown, hard-shelled beetles called June bugs, which certainly do long outlive the month to which they are assigned, were humming and zipping and blundering and clashing around the gasoline street lamps of Medicine Grove, and cutting zigzag excursions through the unscreened church windows, getting down the backs of deacons and clawing ladies' necks. It was a humid, sticky, uncomfortable night, with a feeling of vapidness in the atmosphere, from which some essential component for the felicity of mankind seemed to be lacking.

Sheriff Augerbright was first to reach the field. He came arrayed like a bridegroom in broadcloth coat and white necktie, hair parted as straight as a chalk line down the middle of his pate. He appeared very competent and assured as he put his big fiddle down on a chair like an overfed child. He smiled around with that broad, bland complacency which made him popular with elderly ladies. His romantic calling also shed a glamourous light around him in the hearts of certain fond fair ones, especially the unattached, as many a mediocre man before and after him, clothed in official consequence or official uniform, has been laved in the adoration of languishing eyes.

Sid Stilwell was somewhat more daring in his raiment, for he was a man who had seen the world and minstrel shows. He was garbed in a seersucker coat, red vest, very light trousers, and yellow, low-cut shoes. He carried a little bamboo cane, such as street vendors offer on Labor Day. He came as a victor; applause greeted his appearance, and followed him to the place beside the pulpit reserved for the strivings of these two tremendous fiddlers.

Editor Bill McCamish was governor of the event, and the public was to be the jury. McCamish met each contestant at the door and escorted him with fitting ceremony to his place. He was dressed for the occasion in a knee-length black coat, which seemed to suggest no remote kinship with the editorial trousers so familiar in the sight of men. Like the everyday garment which clothed his undoubtedly lank editorial limbs, the coat was roomy enough to admit more flesh than McCamish appeared in the way of accumulating for some time to come. Beneath this episcopal garment, the editor wore a white vest, and there was a large white carnation in his buttonhole.

In his capacity of promoter and manager of the event, McCamish mounted the platform and stood beside the pulpit to contribute a few verbal paragraphs to the occasion. Speaking in behalf of the contestants, he said, the public must understand that the flood of music about to be let loose in the ears of Medicine Grove—the echoes of which would resound to the farthermost league of our shores—would carry no enmity in it. It would flow

from the heart and instrument of each respected virtuoso with nothing more bitter in it than the praiseworthy desire to excel.

He spoke of the beautiful rivalry that had animated barber against sheriff through the past many years, all to the fame, glory, pleasure, and profit of Medicine Grove. Now, in this supreme effort of friendly endeavor, these musical giants had come before the public in a new and novel matching of their splendid endowments. It might be that Nature, impartial of her disbursements, had not set one a grace note above the other; perhaps they were so evenly matched that man could not discriminate, could not weigh, said the editor, the difference in the length and breadth of their talent. This inability to judge between them in the past had resulted, as everybody knew, in partisan alignment. It was the editor's hope that the public would unite as one in impartial judgment that night, remembering that there was no rancor in the heart of city marshal against sheriff, barber against county official.

Augerbright attempted to appear lofty when McCamish spoke of this state of amity. He was like a big dog ignoring a little one, yet plainly conscious of the whelp's impertinence, and annoyed by it beneath his dignified exterior.

Sid made no pretense at all. He sniffed, turned a scornful eye on the sheriff, moved his hat from one chair to another, and turned red around the neck. He didn't like Augerbright, and it stirred his depths to be misrepresented on the point.

The city marshal, said the editor, stood in the position of a man taking the affirmative in debate. He had said he could down the sheriff in a musical wrestling match; the sheriff had contended that he could not. Such being the situation, Sid would have the first go, and the privilege of one tune to close on, if the public desired it, after the old and established custom of allowing the accuser to speak twice, against once for the accused.

Under this happy arrangement, City Marshal Sidney Fremont Stilwell would now proceed to present his argument for their favor. McCamish made a motion of the hand as if producing Sid from behind a curtain, although he had been sitting, smiling and confident, all the time in plain view. That done, McCamish bowed, and retired to the vestibule at the front of the house, hand in his white vest, as if to gather the effect of the performance from an artistic distance.

Sid cast his eyes around for sight of the Widow Ridley as he rose and set the butt end of the fiddle under his chin. He did not see her, for it was like seeking one particular pansy in a clustered bed of them. The house was full of lovely faces, all turned up toward him as if they waited to be kissed. There were other faces not so lovely; gray old faces with cynical challenge of his fitness in them; lean faces, fat faces, leering and grinning and turning in the light, as if gathering pleasure from the anticipated noise of his fall.

But there was not a tremor in Sid's arm, not a wandering of a finger, as he poised the bow and came down on the G-string with a note that made them start. There was such vigor in that first note, so much triumph of presentation, that it seemed as if Sid had been saving it up all his life for that historic hour. It was the beginning of an improvised prelude leading to a medley. Sid was there to show them he was none of their one-tune men.

He led them through the hearthstone classics which they knew and valued above all the music of the earth, coming to his close on "Suwanee River," his eyes fixed on the asparagus wreath that had been a fly roost on the chandelier

all summer. He lost no friends by his performance; if noise indicated numbers, he must have made a hundred new ones.

Sheriff Augerbright was not disconcerted by this expression of approval. He lowered his music stand, spread out his sheets, moving with artistic deliberation to create suspense, and to show them what a superior man and musician confronted them now. He spread out over a good deal of floor, the fiddle standing between his knees like a dumpy dull pupil come up to say her lesson. He keyed a little, plunked a little, and made a flourish with his bow.

These preliminaries were impressive, but not sufficient. People were still under the spell of Sid's melodies. A little weak applause greeted the sheriff's tuning, but his admirers began to have cloudings of doubt, drooping feelings of fear. "Old Aunt Rhody" wasn't much of a tune after that entrancing burst of melody still ringing in their ears. Worse and more of it, Sid would have another swing at him, to put him under the sod for good.

Many a man was in a dry heat that minute, thinking what a deluded fool he had been all those years to bank blindly on old John Augerbright on no better argument than the uncommon size of his fiddle. It proved what contrariness and prejudice would do for a man, they thought, feeling that the sheriff's impending disgrace was their own.

Augerbright poised his stubby bow. His coat sleeve was taken up in the angle of his arm, his hard round cuff, its onyx button like a cake of castile soap, extended four inches beyond it. In that immense piece of starched linen, the sheriff's fat wrist looked like a sapling run through a stovepipe.

"Old Aunt Rhody" was on her way; there was no help for it, no saving them from the disgrace of it, which his champions had come to realize too late. There was no chance of lightning, no hope of paralysis striking that strong, determined arm. The bow was on the strings; they began to hum in that indeterminate sweeping that always went ahead of the sheriff's main tune like the track of clouds before a storm. People who felt shame for a strong man of such simple delusions turned their heads, or bent them in the confusion of humiliating recollections.

Now the sheriff was coming up to it strong, neck extended like a race horse, his face near the music; coming right into it, with a roar on the bass, a sharp jab now on the higher notes; right into it, neck, ears and all. But the tune that began to shape out of his roarings and rumblings was not the tune of "Old Aunt Rhody."

Not "Old Aunt Rhody" by a mile! Familiar bars, rude and ill-timed, fell from that rumble and roar, but not the familiar strains which certain people of Medicine Grove had grown to believe the summit of human achievement on a fiddle of that size. It came clearer as the sheriff worked off the rubbish that encumbered his full swing, as he got his foot going, and the steam in his bow. It was a march: it was the march Emma Robinson always played on the church organ when there was a wedding. It was "The Wedding March"!

People in Medicine Grove always called it that: "The Wedding March." Just as they always spoke of the schottische and the waltz. No matter what wedding march it was, it was the easiest one to play that ever was written. When it struck the ears of those who had shrunk down in their places ashamed of John Augerbright, ashamed of themselves for their championship of him, they felt a prickling like a patriotic thrill run over them. It seemed to them as if feathers for wings were starting through their skins,

and that they were about to fly upward in the triumph of the good old sheriff's genius.

Sid Stilwell, sitting near the vestry door, felt his pride go down, his confidence turn cold. There was the answer to that false editor's mail-order activities. He had been an enemy, a night-working traitor, as suspected, all the time.

But it was a horrible thing that he had connived with Augerbright to bring to this head. Music was blasphemed by it; harmony was outraged for a thousand years. Only a master can make music on the violincello. In the hands of another, the result is only the torture of a fiddle intensified. Sid Stilwell knew that; he knew it as well as any man alive. But he knew, also, that the knowledge of it would not save him from the disgrace of defeat. Augerbright had overleaped the bounds of artistic perfection, according to the standard of Medicine Grove. He had achieved another tune.

How the old scoundrel was blundering into it, with about as much notion of time and harmony as a butcher sawing a steak! No wonder people were straining and craning—what was that? The minister coming out of the vestry, his book open in his hand. And down the aisle, just entering the vestibule door, Bill McCamish, with the Widow Ridley on his arm!

Sid Stilwell felt that he was vanishing away like a lump of lard in a hot skillet. Above the noise of Augerbright's atrocious fiddling, a shuffling rose out of the house as people shifted and turned to see. In the excitement of it, Sid Stilwell, a humiliated man, sick, blasted in his vanity, reached for his fiddle and his hat, left his bamboo cane standing beside a chair, and slipped away through the vestry door.

The sheriff saw nothing of the approaching procession, or of the preacher stepping out toward the rail with the book in his hand, for he dared not take an eye off the music for fear of making a slip that would necessitate an abrupt stop and a new beginning. He fiddled on, now blundering on the big strings, now shrieking like sonant lightning on the thinner ones. The preacher had to stop him by a touch on the shoulder as the candidates approached the altar.

When Augerbright turned and saw the editor who had led him into that pitfall of his undoing, and the widow upon whom he had counted as so much money in the bank, he was so hot in his sudden resentment of the shabby trick that it rushed upon him to smash the false editor over the head with his instrument. His muscles tightened for the blow; his fingers closed on the neck of the plethoric fiddle. The minister stepped in front of him, and the couple knelt like trained horses on the cushion before the chancel rail.

Augerbright felt the heat run out of him as the ceremony began. The bitterness of shame came into his mouth. It would be many a long day before Medicine Grove would allow him to forget the humiliation of that hour. He had played them up to the altar like a man taking pleasure in twisting the rope for his own hanging. He gathered his instrument under one arm, its case under the other, and tiptoed, silently and sadly, out through the vestry door.

Sid had stopped outside to listen and think. The sheriff blundered into him, the naked fiddle under his arm. Neither spoke, but neither retreated. It came to both of them; in their common humiliation at the hands of McCamish and Sally Ridley, that they had been stranded by fate upon ground where they could stand without a quarrel. Treachery had cast them up, shipwrecked of their pride and conceit, both of their souls as bare to the night as the sheriff's big fiddle.

"Well, he's marryin' her," said the city marshal, with affectation of scorn.

"It looks like it," the sheriff admitted, feeling small and sold.

The sound of laughter and gay words came to them out of the church. Congratulations were going forward there, but no word of that boisterous felicitation was for them. They listened, thinking of vengeance. But McCamish had married riches; they couldn't hurt him if they knocked him so hard that his advertising dwindled down to nothing.

"I guess it was their idear of a joke," said Sid, drawing a deep breath, determined to set his teeth and make the best of it.

"Well, it was a dang poor one!" the sheriff sighed.

"And you said something that time, feller!" the city marshal returned with more vehemence, more feeling, than he ever fiddled into a tune in all his days.

CHAPTER XXV.

AS IN THE BEGINNING.

THAT had been a good season for Phil Heggin. His live stock had thrived, the yield of his fields had been bountiful; there was wheat in his bins, corn in his shocks, and plenty on his board. Gip Lott's welcome was a hearty one, with no shadow of gloom overhanging it, when he drove up to the gate in the dusk of that November evening. Even Hilary rose to his name in the effusion and enthusiasm of his greeting, lending a hand at unhitching the team, carrying them off to the barn for a hearty feed.

Gip had been a long time away from his old beat; that was his first visit since the day he rode south on his tall claybank nag, trailing Colly Campbell, a feeling of remorse in his bosom over having been responsible for the young man's abandonment of his heritage. Colly never had upbraided him with a word, and here Gip was back again now, easy in mind, affluent in circumstances, his gaudy medicine wagon somewhat splashed with mud, the roads being wet, as full of news as his friends were full of eagerness to hear it.

Gip made Mrs. Heggin a ceremonious presentation of pain killer, pills, and poultry remedy before uncorking his news. They swarmed around him, Phil Heggin looming like a beef-eater in his black whiskers, Mrs. Heggin moving about with ponderous placidity, "Puss" handing out a clean towel and the Sunday soap, everybody talking and laughing, Gip as polite as any ambassador that ever crooked knee before a king.

They wanted to know if what they had heard about Gip losing his horse, and his dramatic recovery of it, was true; and whether that story in the paper about Colly Campbell shooting up Al Waddell and his partner was not a mistake, or if it wasn't some other man by the same name; and what was there to that tale crediting Colly with saving the bank's money when Waddell and his gang raided Medicine Grove last summer? They couldn't believe it was the Colly Campbell they had known, at least the men of the family could not. As for Puss and her mother, they looked triumphantly expectant, knowing in their generous hearts all the time it was the very Colly Campbell who had been their neighbor, and whose valor and worth had been ridiculed and impugned.

With the true form of a valiant and modest man, Gip made little of his own adventures and a great deal of Colin Campbell's. He began at the beginning, and worked slowly, wordily, consecutively, to the end, or at least to the end of that chapter in Campbell's life which had been rounding to a happy close when Gip left Medicine

Grove little more than a week past. He related how Bill McCamish had walked into a million through a scheme that had its origin in Colly Campbell's wise and witty head. Not a cent less than a million, Gip declared, Bill McCamish had taken over with the widow, and he was so grateful to Colly for it that he had traded him a half interest in the *Mirror* for the old Campbell homestead which cornered on Phil Heggin's land.

At that news, Heggin sat up, swelling with incredulity.

"Now, hold on, Gip," he said, severe as if he had a horse thief before him and was not to be deceived by any specious tale, "you don't mean to set there and tell me Colly was fool enough to trade off that good farm for a half interest, a *half* interest, in any piddlin' little newspaper down in Medicine Grove?"

"Yes, but it was more a gift McCamish made him than it was value received," Gip astonished him further by declaring. "Colly says so himself. He said he was ashamed to make the trade, but McCamish wanted it that way. Took the farm 'sight-'nseen' for a half interest, and bought him and his wife tickets for a trip to foreign lands. I guess it was her money he bought 'em with."

"Well, that cinches what I always said about Colly," Heggin declared with fatalistic pronouncement. "I'd 'a' bought that farm from him, cash money; I'd 'a' give him seventeen hundred dollars for that farm. I could take that land and clear a thousand dollars a year off of it. So could he, if he had sense enough to manage it right."

Gip leaned back, replete with fried chicken and apple pie. He balanced on the hind legs of his chair in his genteel way, thumbs hooked in the pockets of his vest, his head thrown back, whiskers pointing to the wall.

"Colly'll make more than double that," he said complacently, his knowledge concerning the rewards of country journalism being very meager, indeed.

"If he makes a livin', he'll do well," Heggin growled. "Triflin' away that good farm on a newspaper! And I'd 'a' give him two thousand dollars, cash money, for it if I'd been pushed to the limit. Worth it, too; worth every cent of it. And now he's went and trifled it away!"

Puss was delaying her task of clearing away the plates and broken meats of the feast. She sat in her place, moving the saltcellar abstractedly in a little half circle around her saucer, eyes fixed introspectively on something that nobody but herself could see. The summer had rounded her a little, and browned her much. She was plump, and red, and russet as a young robin; a little more like Hilary than she was when Gip had seen her last, but not greatly to her disadvantage yet, he thought.

"Is he changed much, Gip?" she inquired with timid hesitation.

"He's the changedest boy you ever saw," Gip declared enthusiastically. "He looks to me like he's growed two or three inches——"

"Gi-*raft!*" said Hilary, rolling back his heavy lips in a double-fold grin. "If he's any higher than he was when he left here, he can lick salt off of the roof."

"Salt," Heggin repeated ruminatively, his eyes on the clumsy glass container which Puss was sliding around her saucer like a piece in some solitary game. "You remember what you was tellin' us, last time you was here, about the Campbell bad luck on account of wasted salt?"

"I sure do," Gip replied cheerfully "It was me tellin' that story that started Colly on his way to better luck and fortune. I blamed myself for gabbin'

too much at first, but I'm glad of it now."

"I don't suppose we'd hardly know him," Mrs. Heggin said, a little sadly, as people speak generally of one who has passed them, and gone on out of their ken, leaving them in the rut from which there will be no deviation to the world's end.

"I'd know him if I seen his feet stickin' out of a mudhole," Hilary snorted.

"He's wearin' tailor-mades," Gip nodded, as if confirming Mrs. Heggin in her belief that the matter of identification might be difficult, indeed. "He's one of the fancy steppers of that town, I'm here to say!"

"He may see that day before long he'll be glad to have a pair of overalls to pull on his legs," Heggin commented sourly. "Foolin' that farm away for nothin', or worse than nothin'."

"I hope he's not got swell-headed and bullyin', after shootin' all them men down there," Mrs. Heggin remarked with a sigh.

"I'll bully him; I'll show him where to head in if he ever comes back to this country, slingin' his darn gun around," Hilary threatened. "Next time you see him, Gip, ask him if he remembers the day I made him bore a hole through his wire fence, gittin' away from me. And I didn't have no gun, neither."

Puss looked across at her square-ended brother with a little malicious grin.

"That was the day you came tearin' out of the pasture and tried to ride through the bars. I remember the time; you looked like you'd met your own ghost."

Hilary's face flamed; he seemed undetermined between knife and spoon as a missile of correction, finally fixing his choice on a biscuit. This he snatched hastily, and threw with a vicious look about him as if he had his ears laid back. Gip threw up his hand like a first baseman, catching it neatly.

"Don't be throwin' vittles around that way!" Heggin corrected his son harshly. "If you want to throw something, take off a boot."

Puss rose and began clearing away the dishes. Gip let himself down and put his elbows on the cloth, looking across at Hilary with something not entirely admiring in his friendly eyes.

"He's not a gun-flashin' man, Hilary," Gip informed the stud-necked young farmer. "He don't even carry a gun around. When he wants one, he goes and gits it, and when he gits it, he uses it. I ain't goin' to make any inquiries about the time you run him. I know all about it; Colly was tellin' me."

Hilary's redness cooled to the purple of confusion. His father gave him a sidelong, questioning glance, and Puss let go a peal of derisive laughter which would have been corrected by the discomfited young man with another biscuit if his mother had not caught his hand.

"I thought I heard somebody drive up," she said. "You'd better go and see who it is and what they want."

Somebody's foot struck the porch as Hilary was getting up sulkily to investigate. The visitor knocked on the door with a hard sound as if he had knuckles of wood. The caller was "Old Man" Coggshall, the seer who had recommended castor beans in a triple row to Colin Campbell as a *chevaux-de-frise* which would intercept and impale evil fortune rising out of wasted salt.

Coggshall came clumping into the big kitchen where the supper table was spread, boots to his knees, his bunions eased by slashes in the leather, hickory whipstock with its long rawhide lash grasped in his hand as if he had come on a mission of hostility, which his stiff, forward-pointing beard seemed to support. The old man walked inclined forward from the hinge of his hips,

which appeared to be the only movable joint in his anatomy except his jaw. He was full of news, and he couldn't wait until he had creaked down into a chair to get the heaviest of it off his mind.

"I just drove past the old Campbell place," he said, turning his head sharply, demanding the attention of everybody to what was coming. "Colly's back."

Everybody but Gip Lott was properly surprised. Mrs. Heggin exclaimed; Heggin rumbled in his whiskers, and Hilary sniffed and turned fiery, as if his old animosity would break out in a forked flame. Puss stood at the table over across the room, where she had been stacking the dishes. She turned her head quickly, the light of eagerness in her eyes, a flush on her summer-browned cheeks.

"Yeah," said Gip easily, "he told me he was comin'."

"Huh! Told you, did he?" Cogshall grunted, displeased that Gip's assurance had taken the edge off his news.

"More than a week ago," Gip replied. "Said he was comin' after his books and some things he wanted, and to make arrangements for sellin' off the rest. He's sold the place, you know, Coggshall."

Coggshall didn't know it, and he was doubly nettled because he didn't, and he was resentful as any man is when he finds out that something which he believed to be new and original is only secondhand.

"Well, you're such a travelin' newspaper, maybe you know who that woman is he's got with him?" Coggshall said with scandalized triumph.

"Woman?" said Mrs. Heggin. "You sure it wasn't Joe Dunnegan's wife you saw?"

"Joe Dunnegan's grandmother! He's gallivantin' around with some young flip he's picked up and brought——"

"I'd go kind of slow if I was in your boots," Gip suggested, giving the old gossip a hard eye.

"Do you know who she is, Gip?" Mrs. Heggin demanded, in a manner severe for her.

Puss stood with hands idle among the plates, the clatter of crockery stilled. She turned her head a little to catch Gip's reply, which was not immediately forthcoming. Indeed, Gip made a long pause of it, as if deliberating the worthiness of the company, or the propriety of his revelation, or something or another that he had in the back of his head. He sat with a thoughtful cast on his heroic chin, an effect of judicial pondering on his humanitarian side whiskers, his twinkling, friendly eyes veiled by downcast lids. They all thought he hesitated in guilty knowledge of some wild escapade and would connive to shield Colly when he opened his mouth.

"Huh, gallivantin' around with some young hussy and fetchin' her here to flip her in our faces!" said Coggshall. "I seen 'em moonin' around out there under them cedar trees by the gate when I come past a little while ago. You don't need to try to tell me that he——"

"No, nobody don't need to try to tell you anything, Coggshall," Gip cut in on him in what was, for a mild and smooth-spoken man like him, a very rude and unprecedented manner. "Your danged old head's so hard my bone-spavin liniment wouldn't penetrate it more than a sixteenth of an inch, and that wouldn't come within four inches of your brains. Of course, he's got a woman with him! Course he's gallivantin'—if you want to call it gallivantin'—around with her in a spring wagon and a good span of horses hired from the livery barn in Medicine Grove, and I guess he's kickin' kind of high. I know I would be, if I had me a bran'-new wife worth a million dollars."

"Why, Gip Lott! Is he *married?*" Mrs. Heggin stood gaping after the question, mouth and eyes wide open, waiting for Gip's answer to fly right in and hit her to the quick without loss of time.

"He sure is, ma'am," Gip assured her, bearing down on it hard to make the refutation of Coggshall's attempted slander as censorious as words could be.

Puss, standing over the dishpan, drooped at the words. Her shoulders sagged just a little; she bent her head and groped, as through the obscuration of tears, among the cluttered dishes on the table. Hilary, a big, malicious grin rolling back his thick lips, looked around for something to throw at her. There being nothing at hand to his purpose, he flung at her a loud and derisive "Ya-a-ah!" which hurt her more than the hardest object he ever had struck her with in all his gallant days.

"Well, you're the beatinest man, Gip Lott! Why didn't you tell us he was married?" Mrs. Heggin reproved him.

"I hadn't worked down to it yet, ma'am," said Gip.

"Married, huh?" Heggin commented, not greatly moved. "How does he expect to keep a wife after foolin' away that farm?"

"He ain't worryin' much," Gip laughed. "He married Molva Pillow, Old Man Pillow's daughter. Pillow owns about everything in Medicine Grove but the courthouse and the railroad depot. He's worth a million, and Molva's due to come in for it all."

"Seems to be a lot of people worth a million dollars down in that town," Hilary scoffed. "I bet the whole dang town ain't worth a million dollars! Do you know how long it'd take you to count a million dollars?"

"I'll let you know, Hilary, in a year or two more, when I git the rest of it scraped up," said Gip.

"So Colly's goin' to sell off the furniture?" Mrs. Heggin said speculatively. "I wonder what he wants for that marble-topped bureau of his ma's?"

"I guess I'll be able to tell you, after I look it over," Gip replied. "I'm goin' to do the sellin' for him; he's got to go back to his newspaper editin' tomorrow."

"Married Old Man Pillow's girl, did he?" Heggin ruminated aloud. "Huh! Her money won't last long with a Campbell ahold of it."

"You'll see," Gip nodded with confidence. "You'll see that boy away up at the top of the ladder one of these days, and that before long. He's a comer; he's left his bad luck behind him a million miles."

"Ye-es, he'll be president, next thing we hear of him," Hilary derided. "You wait and see!"

"No-o-o-o," said Gip judicially, "I don't look for him to be president; but you'll see him gov'ner before you're a bal'-headed man."

"When that happens, I'll leave the State," Heggin declared with as much feeling as if he believed it imminent. "Man that'd fool away a good piece of land like that!"

THE END.

Almost Roped

By Christopher B. Booth

Author of "Handcuffed in the Desert," etc.

DESPITE several circumstances which might be reasonably expected to put a man in a low state of mind, "The Gallopin' Kid" had not parted company with his characteristic and persistent good humor. Neither had he parted company with a large and healthy appetite, as was apparent from the size of the meal he had ordered at The Yellow Dog Lunch Room.

Six fried eggs, two large and thick slices of ham, an enormous stack of pancakes, a small mountain of fried potatoes, topped off with a prodigious slice of raisin pie, and two cups of coffee—this was a man-sized breakfast, and The Gallopin' Kid disposed of it in man-sized fashion, to the interest and admiration of several onlookers, mostly cow-punchers like himself, who could tuck away a good hefty meal on their own account.

Occupying an adjoining stool at the lunch counter was a runty, sad-looking cowboy morosely confining himself to a modest breakfast. The reason was financial, he having lost his month's wages in a poker game in the hotel.

The eyes of the two met and The Gallopin' Kid grinned amiably as he swallowed the last bite of pie and drained his coffee cup.

"Howdy," he said, his voice a soft, likable drawl. "I'm a stranger hereabouts and I got a desire to accumulate information as to the various cow outfits with a view to ropin' myself a job.

"Baxter's my handle, pardner, called by some The Gallopin' Kid. I'm quite a piece off my reg'lar range, bein' a wanderin' cuss who's blessed with a roamin' nature."

The runty cowboy held out a freckled hand.

" 'Shorty' Oliver's my pussonal brand, stranger, and I ride with Circle X outfit, down on Indian Creek. I hope yuh ain't bad in need of a job—which I allow you ain't, to jedge from the generous way yuh've been indulgin' yore stommick—fer yuh've shore struck a dang pore place to git one. All the outfits is cuttin' down 'stead of takin' on any new hands, and a job's harder to find than a water hole in the middle of a desert."

The Gallopin' Kid fished two silver dollars from his pocket, jingled them

together briefly, and tossed one of them down on the counter.

"If I ain't all mixed up with my addition," he said, still smiling, "what I've et kills this cart wheel to the even nickel, and that leaves me one buck for my hoss' stable bill, after which, brother, I'll mebbe have two-bits between me and that plumb discouragin' financial state, status, an' condition sometimes called destitution."

"Yeh?" responded Shorty Oliver, his tone divided between sympathy and skepticism. "Right down to hardpan, huh? I must say yuh take it mighty cheerful."

"Won't help matters none to go around with a long face and bleatin' like a ewe lamb what's lost its mamma, but"—The Gallopin' Kid's manner became slightly more serious—"as you can see, pardner, I got to rope myself a job purty quick.

"Now, I'm a reasonably modest fellow, but bein' a stranger on a strange range, buddy, I reckon I got to toot my own horn if there's goin' to be any tootin' done. I been wranglin' hosses and herdin' cows 'most since I was able to sit a saddle and there ain't an outfit I ever threw in with that wasn't pleased to pay me top wages. If I do say so myself——"

"Shore," broke in Shorty with an affirmative nod; "a good puncher always looks jest what he is and don't need no written recommends. If times was normal, I allow there ain't a foreman within two days' ridin' but would shake hands with himself to write yore name down on his pay roll.

"Now, when I like a feller I like him instant and I'd shore like to see yuh join up with the Circle X, but it would be takin' yuh on a twenty-mile ride fer nothin'. Two of the boys was let out day 'fore yesterday."

This discouraging news was received by The Gallopin' Kid with his customary philosophic attitude of accepting situations as he found them. He knew that Shorty was giving him an honest picture of local conditions. Apparently nothing remained but for him to ride back North from where he had come.

A few seats from where Gallopin' sat were two cronies who had evidently found ways and means of slightly fracturing The Eighteenth Amendment. This pair were mildly tipsy. One of them whispered to the other, who grinned and jerked his head vigorously; then they rose and sauntered over. The taller of the two, lean and sun-baked, spoke for both.

"Lookin' fer a job, eh, stranger? So me and my buddy gathered from overhearin' what you was sayin'."

"That's right," nodded The Gallopin' Kid, "and it'll be real friendly of you to put me on the trail of one."

"Just what we reckon to do," said the lean puncher. "So happens we know one outfit that's short-handed."

Shorty Oliver, taking into account his own knowledge of ranch conditions and the playfulness of spirit that is often induced by a few drinks too many, looked doubtful.

"What outfit, huh?" he demanded challengingly.

"It's the Calkins' Ranch, eighteen-twenty miles north of here."

"Calkins' Ranch?" Shorty questioned, his skepticism increasing. "Never heard tell of it."

"Well," drawled the slightly intoxicated informant, "it ain't what you might call a big outfit and if a feller could pick an' choose most likely it ain't the kind of a berth he'd hanker fer, but this stranger is wantin' a job and, sich as it is, I'm tellin' him where he can git one. That's a lot better'n you was able to do."

Shorty Oliver detected, he thought, a vague hint of mischief in the eyes of these two apparently well-intending punchers. It would be a bum joke, sending a man on a wild-goose chase.

"Hey, you, Pete!" he called loudly to the proprietor of The Yellow Dog Lunch Room. "Did'ja ever hear of an outfit called the Calkins' Ranch?"

"Sure!" shouted Pete who, his back being turned, concealed the fact that he was struggling with a desire to burst out in uproarious laughter. "It's up north, just other side of Box A."

"I reckon that settles it," said Shorty, turning to The Gallopin' Kid, "and looks like you stumbled into luck. Likely it'll tide yuh over until things kinder open up."

"If I was you," suggested the puncher who had come forward with the welcome information, "I'd make tracks up there pronto—'fore that there job gits away from you."

The Gallopin' Kid thanked the pair, got directions as to how to reach the Calkins' Ranch, shook hands warmly with Shorty Oliver, and left the lunch room to get his horse. He attached no significance to the fact that, behind him, the lunch room began to fairly rock with unrestrained laughter. With only twenty-five cents between him and the necessity of an appeal to generosity for his next meal, his only thought was getting the job before some one else heard about it and beat him to it.

The appearance of The Gallopin' Kid as he rode north was anything but that of a man destitute. His horse was no sorry-looking cast-off from a ranch corral, but a splendid animal with the pride of good blood in him. His saddle was silver mounted and bore an inscription that attested he had won it as a prize at a rodeo.

It was hot down in this country and, as the sun rose higher, he slackened his brisk pace out of consideration for his mount. Presently he felt the inclination to sing. Not that he *could* sing a note, but he knew the words fo several songs; and so long as the sound of his own voice pleased him and there was apparently no musical ear to be offended by the strenuous although futile effort to achieve harmony, it was strictly Gallopin's own affair.

His memory functioned better with his eyes closed, and so he rode with that loose-jointed ease which has much of grace in it despite the fact that it might not have met with the approval of the professional riding instructor. Perhaps it was prophetic that Gallopin' chose a sentimental ballad from his limited repertoire, and his voice presently smote the air with the murdered strains of "Sweet Adeline."

Directions for reaching the Calkins' Ranch had been explicit and unmistakable. He passed Box A, which appeared to be an outfit of some consequence with buildings that proclaimed a fair degree of prosperity. His destination lay just beyond, no great distance as distance is measured out in that wide, open country, and another half an hour brought him to it.

Gallopin' reined up and, from the rise of a hill, looked down upon the corral below him. It was, he decided, by all odds the smallest corral he had ever seen, as was, too, the ranch house which, while right neat and cozy looking, couldn't have contained more than four rooms. The outbuildings were in proportion.

"Ranch?" he exploded. "Who said this was a ranch?" Suddenly he was assailed by misgivings, remembering the storm of laughter that had marked his departure from the lunch room back in Sagebrush. "Somethin' tells me there's a catch in this somewheres and kinder 'pears like I bit on somethin'." He grinned with that rarest sense of humor, the ability to smile at a joke on himself. "Well, I reckon I might as well go through with it, havin' come this far."

The Gallopin' Kid rode on down the slope and, approaching the corral, heard the ring of a hammer against the fence,

forceful, businesslike blows. Now this was a trifle unusual, for the average cowhand is a reluctant and unenthusiastic carpenter. All he could see for a moment was a black, wide-brimmed hat, and the shoulders of a flannel shirt.

"Howdy, greetings and et cetry!" he called airily as he rode up.

The hammer blows ceased, the black hat lifted, and he found himself staring into the eyes of a woman, her face flushed with exertion. What kind of a place was this anyhow, that a woman had to be nailing up fences?

Her face grim, her mouth tight, and her eyes glinting with an unfriendly light, the woman's attitude was one of instant and martial antagonism.

"Git!" she ordered harshly.

"Now just a minute, ma'm!" The Gallopin' Kid protested, removing his hat as he unfailingly did in a woman's presence. "Is this mebbe the Calkins' Ranch?"

"No 'mebbe' about it," she snapped, "and I guess you know it! What's more, the next one of you Box A men that come around here tryin' to have fun at my expense is goin' to get a load of buckshot."

Here was a situation that aroused interest and curiosity. Moreover, The Gallopin' Kid had no intention of retreating until he had corrected the impression that he was the sort who would seek amusement at any woman's discomfiture.

"Seems like you got me entirely wrong, ma'm," he told her with earnest politeness. "I been saddle-trampin' around and I been havin' a mite of unusual bad luck annexin' myself to a job. Back in Sagebrush this mornin' I was told this was the right place to apply. If I been misinformed——"

"Oh, I see!" The woman's mouth relaxed, her eyes lost their unfriendly hardness. "That's it! You're lookin' for a job?"

"Yes'm, and if you'd be so kind as to tell me where I can find Mr. Calkins I'll——"

"There ain't no Mr. Calkins," she informed him, looking him over with a dissecting stare. "I'm the boss here. My husband is dead."

The Gallopin' Kid now understood why a woman was repairing the corral fence; a swift look about also told him that she was badly in need of a hand. With one glance he could count a dozen jobs waiting to be done, and he doubted if she had any help at all.

It wasn't the sort of a situation that a true rider of the range cares for; no bunk-house cronies, none of the inducements that help to compensate for small pay strenuously earned. In fact, had there been a Mr. Calkins, he wouldn't have considered the job at all. But she was a woman, a widow, and evidently carrying on against odds; and The Gallopin' Kid, in whom the sense of chivalry was very strong, was exactly the sort of chap who would offer himself in such an emergency, regardless of the pay.

"I'm afraid you won't like it," she told him; "I'll keep you trottin'."

"Why, ma'm," answered the cowboy with a laugh, "*gallopin'* is my natcheral gait, and it's kinder my name, too. I'm mostly called 'The Gallopin' Kid,' and I make it a habit, when I work for wages, to earn my pay."

The widow's attitude became more approving.

"That's the kind of talk I like to hear," she said, "but if it's just talk, ride on; if you mean it, you're hired."

"Then I'm workin' here," Gallopin' responded promptly, as he swung down from the saddle. "Lemme have that hammer, ma'm, while you go tuck yourself in the shade somewheres. It's too hot out here in the sun for a woman."

"Tuck myself in the shade—indeed!" she shot back tartly. "Give me orders? I guess not! I'm the boss here—understand that."

"Yes'm," The Gallopin' Kid said meekly. The widow strode away with a dominant manner to look after other duties, and he watched her departure with a speculative frown.

"She ain't young," he told himself; "she ain't purty, and she ain't none too pleasant; but none of them three things alters the fact that she's a woman and needs helpin' out. It ain't the kind of a job I was lookin' for, but I reckon I can stand it until she gets herself another hand."

From time to time as he went about repairing the fence, he was aware that the widow was spying on him, evidently to "keep him trotting" if he lagged below her standard of industry.

Within twenty-four hours it became quite clear to The Gallopin' Kid just why it was that the Widow Calkins appeared to have experienced difficulty in keeping a cowhand. To begin with, tending her small herd of cows was the smallest part of it. The roof of the little two-room bunk house leaked and called for repairs; everywhere Gallopin' turned there was something to be done, work enough for three men, and more than once Gallopin's sense of chivalry very nearly failed him, for there seemed no satisfying the woman, and the more he did the more she expected.

Her tongue was sharp, her demands often unfair, and frequently it was an effort for him to abide by his code of never speaking impolitely to a lady, and yet he managed to restrain himself and to submit meekly. Almost every night when he turned in at the diminutive bunk house, aching with weariness, he made the fervent vow that he would give her notice the following morning.

"Woman or no woman," he raged indignantly when he was alone, "I never did see such a slave-driver, male or female. To-morrow I quit!" The next morning, however, would find him rested and inclined to stay until he had finished out the month. There was one compensation; the Widow Calkins was a most exceptional cook.

And then her attitude toward him suddenly underwent a bewildering change.

"Mr. Baxter," she said one morning at breakfast when he had nearly rounded out his month, "I reckon you think I've been runnin' you ragged."

The Gallopin' Kid's mouth sagged open in surprise and he was momentarily bereft of speech.

The widow sighed deeply.

"You ain't got no idea, Mr. Baxter, how tryin' it is to be a lone woman, havin' debts to pay off, and seein' things go to rack and ruin. I—I don't know *what* would have happened to me if you hadn't come along. It's just like you was sent by Providence. I'd like you to know how I appreciate it."

"W-why, that's all right, ma'm," stammered The Gallopin' Kid, slowly recovering from the shock. "You ain't heard me complainin' none, have you?"

"I declare, Mr. Baxter, you must be a saint to have put up with me!" the widow exclaimed, sighed again, and added: "I reckon you don't understand how a lone widow feels she ought to pertect herself. There's some men has got to be kept in their place. It ain't every cowhand who's a real gentleman, like you are."

"Aw, now!" The Gallopin' Kid modestly exclaimed. "Punchers ain't such a bad lot, takin' 'em as a whole."

Now, if Gallopin' had been wiser in the ways of womankind—more specifically, the widow's kind—he would have been forewarned in what direction events were being craftily headed, particularly when the Widow Calkins, in addition to softening her speech, fairly plied him with good food, and took to wearing more feminine clothes and to detaining him for long chats after supper. By questions deftly scattered, she got the history of his life.

Her face, too, seemed to change. Her expression softened, making her less formidable looking and Gallopin' began to wonder if he hadn't been grossly unfair in putting her age at forty. One day a package arrived by mail and, immediately thereafter, the widow wore silk stockings at supper time. Finally, The Gallopin' Kid began to have a feeling of uneasiness.

"Mr. Baxter," he counseled with himself one evening when he had retired to his quarters in the bunk house, "your month is up on the tenth, which is day after to-morrow—and day after to-morrow, Mr. Baxter, you and this place is goin' to part company. Yep and yes, sir, a couple uh times!"

Almost as if she could read his mind, the Widow Calkins set her climax for the month's anniversary of Gallopin's employment. Actually she had seen him looking over his riding gear and knew what it meant. Supper that evening was a culinary triumph, made the more enjoyable by a little of the widow's homemade wine, and it did seem base ingratitude to serve notice on her that he was quitting, and so he delayed. To-morrow, he decided, would be time enough.

It had taken the Widow Calkins nearly three weeks of careful and painstaking observation to arrive at the conclusion that The Gallopin' Kid would make a desirable husband, the deciding factors being a willingness to work hard and long without complaint, and a docility that would knuckle under her thumb. Thereafter, she had studied him with a view to finding the most direct path to his heart.

After supper she revealed a purchase which, until now, she had kept a secret. It was a phonograph, equipped with a dozen records, and, as the machine played, Gallopin' sat entranced, hypnotized. The wine had barely warmed his blood, but the music intoxicated him, carried him into another world, veiled everything with a seductive beauty it did not possess.

Yes, it was the phonograph that was really Gallopin's undoing—the phonograph and the moonlight. For there was, too, a full moon, and the widow maneuvered him onto the small porch of her little house while a record was being played. The soft, golden radiance did kindly things to the widow's face. She had used some sweet-smelling perfume on her hair. The spell was complete, the illusion perfect.

"I guess I ain't ever been so happy as I am to-night," she murmured and sighed; "the music, the moon, the stars——" Her voice trailed off dreamily.

"Y-yes'm," The Gallopin' Kid agreed a bit huskily. "It—it's beautiful an' you—you're beautiful, too, ma'm, if you don't mind me sayin' so." He was sorry the moment he had spoken, but it was then too late.

"Gallopin'!" she exclaimed softly, moving a bit closer to him. "You—you mean——"

"Yes'm," he said thickly, a cold chill covering him like a plunge into a mountain crook.

The rest, of course, was inevitable; and before the phonograph record had finished playing, The Gallopin' Kid, for the first time in his life, had got himself engaged to be married.

In the cracked and wavy mirror of the bunk house the next morning The Gallopin' Kid shook an angry fist at himself and gave voice to a soliloquy of disgust and mournful despair.

"Now you've went and done it; you sure have, Mr. William McKinley Baxter! You've done gone and got yerse'f obligated to a state of matrimony, you pore, weak, dang fool! She roped you in good and proper, you idjit—and you got to like it. Yeh, you've got yerse'f in a sweet mess or a sour pickle—or whatever this matrimony business is!"

With his old-fashioned ideas of chivalry, it never occurred to Gallopin' that escape lay in any one of four directions, that in the dead of night it would be a simple matter to saddle his horse and be miles away by sunrise the next morning. To him any sort of a bargain was a matter or honor, and a bargain with a woman particularly so.

"You popped the question, dog-gone it," he further accused himself; "don't make no difference if she did coax you into it, you went and asked her to marry yuh, and there ain't no way you can get out of wearin' her brand."

He thought, sadly, that this was the end of his carefree days. There would be no more saddle-tramping, no more hitting the open trail with the call of some unknown adventure always lying ahead, and in vain did he try to solace himself with a few practical thoughts.

"Mebbe it's the best thing ever happened to you at that, Mr. Baxter," he told himself with complete lack of enthusiasm. "You ain't been nothin' but a harum-scarum, good-fer-nothin' rollin'-stone and mebbe you'll kinder amount to somethin' with a woman to boss you around and make somethin' out of you—mebbe."

Nor did Gallopin's brief and synthetic ardor of the previous evening return when he dragged himself to the house for breakfast and faced his fiancée after a parting of some eight hours. He kissed her, as is the privilege of an engaged couple and as she noticeably expected, but the kiss left him cold.

The widow, however, was bubbling over with enthusiasm, speaking about what she would need for her "trussy," and regretting that there was no one they could leave in charge of the ranch so that they could take a honeymoon. She had, Gallopin' gathered, impatience with long engagements. With the best grace he could manage, he agreed to everything she said.

He wanted, more than anything else, to be alone; so, immediately after breakfast, he got on his horse and started to ride around the place, inspecting the wire fences.

Now it would seem a most trivial matter that a playful breeze should lift a man's hat from his head and send it sailing to the ground, and yet exactly this plunged The Gallopin' Kid even deeper into despair; for, as he dismounted to retrieve his sombrero, which had rolled down into a little ravine, and crawled through the wire strands, he came upon a stone hardly visible above the uncut grass of a small inclosure. It was, he discovered, a modest tombstone, and bore the inscription:

DANIEL CALKINS,
Husband of Susan Calkins.
Born 6-12, 1876.
Died 7-3, 1926.

"Looks like she didn't care much about *him*," grunted Gallopin', noting the untended condition of the grave. He took another step forward and reached down to recover his hat when he observed another mound. Here the marker had toppled over, flat on its back, and with eyes that had begun to bulge slightly, he read the following lines:

NOAH T. MEEKS,
Husband of Susan Meeks,
Died 10-7, 1924.

"Good gosh!" he exclaimed. "She —she's had—two of 'em!"

Nor was this all. There was a third grave, with a slightly more imposing headstone, which recited that Jasper Phelps, also a husband of Susan, had departed from this world of sorrow and this vale of tears on the fifth day of January, nineteen hundred and twenty-one.

The Gallopin' Kid picked up his hat

and, in his nervousness, put it on backward without even noticing the mistake.

"She—she's got her own private buryin' ground fer husbands!" he gasped. "And it—it sort of seems they don't live long after *she* marries 'em! I—I'm beginnin' to feel kinder indisposed myself right this minute!"

In his some ten years of wandering about the country The Gallopin' Kid had displayed considerable aptitude for helping other people out of various scrapes and tight pinches, often showing a rare fund of originality in the process, but just what his procedure would have been in his own case must remain problematical. He was, in fact, groping blindly for an idea as he rode back to the ranch house.

He could, of course, slip away in the dead of night, but he didn't like that way of evading the issue. No, if he rode away at all it would be in broad daylight and with the month's wages that he had coming to him tucked in his pocket. He had earned his pay twice and very nearly three times over. Then, too, he could face the widow and tell her firmly that, not being overenthusiastic about marrying anybody anyhow, he had even less ambition to be a fourth husband, and that wasn't a nice job.

As he approached the corral, he saw a man turning in from the trail, and the blinding glint of metal on the rider's vest reflecting the dazzling sunlight.

"Huh," grunted Gallopin', "looks like we're havin' a mornin' call from the sheriff."

As he spurred forward to meet the official visitor, the Widow Calkins also appeared. The sheriff's approach was anything but friendly. A .45 whipped from its holster and covered Gallopin'.

"Stick 'em up!" came the harshly imperative command, and The Gallopin' Kid, a much dazed and bewildered man, dropped the reins across the pommel of his saddle as he lifted his arms.

"What does this mean?" shrilled the Widow Calkins.

"Sort of seems to me," chimed in Gallopin', "that I got a right to ask the same question, but when a sheriff says 'Stick 'em up!' I does that pronto and discuss it afterward."

"Don't try runnin' no bluff on me," thundered the sheriff; "I got warnin' yuh'd try to play innocent." He rode closer, snapped a pair of handcuffs about Gallopin's wrists, and grinned triumphantly. "All right, Mr. Griggs, alias 'Yuma Bill,' I gotcha, and I reckon we'll be startin' back."

The Widow Calkins darted forward, fire in her eye.

"To think I voted for an old fool like you for sheriff!" she cried. "Griggs—Yuma Bill? This is Mr. Baxter who's been workin' here for me the past month, and he's my——"

"My gosh!" broke in the sheriff. "Don't tell me, woman, that yuh've gone and married this crook!"

The Gallopin' Kid's wits suddenly began to work and his pulse bounded hopefully. He lowered his head, as he fancied a guilty man might, and contorted his normally pleasant face into as villainous a look as possible. The widow's cheeks went pale, as pale, that is, as they could beneath their tan.

"Gallopin'—Mr. Baxter!" she cried. "This—this ain't true, is it?"

"I ain't got nothin' to say," mouthed The Gallopin' Kid, shifting his eyes back and forth.

"So yuh went and married him, huh?" grunted the sheriff, looking as though he wanted to grin. "Waal, ma'm, I reckon the joke's on *you* this time!"

"No, I didn't!" screamed the widow. "But it ain't his fault. He'd talked me into gettin' engaged, and we—we was goin'——" Suddenly she sprang forward as though it were her full inten-

tion to tear him bodily from the saddle and take her revenge in personal violence. Gallopin' swiftly touched his heels to the side of his horse.

"Come on, sheriff!" he called over his shoulder. "It ain't you I'm runnin' from! And I reckon we won't wait to collect the month's wages I got comin', neither!"

On the way back to the town of Sagebrush, Gallopin' gathered that Griggs, alias Yuma Bill, whom he was supposed to be, was a desperado of some consequence, wanted for a few murders, horse stealing, bank robbery, and a choice collection of other crimes and misdemeanors. In vain, once the widow's ranch was behind them, did he try to convince the sheriff that he was only a harmless cow-puncher and, as proof that he was William McKinley Baxter, he pointed to the silver plate on his rodeo saddle. All that got him was a snort.

"Hoss stealin'," said the sheriff, "is one of the crimes yuh're wanted fer, and fer all I know mebbe you killed this Baxter feller in the bargain. Now quit wastin' yore breath, Yuma Bill, fer if ever a feller answered a deescription, yuh answer the one phoned me by the sheriff from Dawson Creek."

It being foolish to argue the point any further, The Gallopin' Kid subsided and offered no remonstrance when he was lodged in the county jail at Sagebrush; and, despite the fact that the jail was a most unattractive one, he was his old cheerful self once again, grinning from ear to ear.

"Anyhow," he drawled to the sheriff as the door of the cell clanged shut behind him, "I'd rather be this here Yuma Bill than that widder woman's fourth husband."

Gallopin's period of confinement was brief, for within less than half an hour, the sheriff, looking disgusted and angry, came to release him.

"Danged if I kin understand it," he fumed, "but when I find out who's playin' tricks on me and makin' law and order ridiculous in this county, they're goin' to suffer fer it. I got a phone message askin' me to arrest this here Yuma Bill feller, givin' me a full an' complete deescription, and addin' the information that he was reported seen out thar on the Calkins' Ranch. I——" he glared at Gallopin's grinning countenance and sputtered. "I ain't sure, mister, if I owe yuh an apology or a good kick!"

"Sheriff," said The Gallopin' Kid, "I'd be real obliged to yuh if you give me the kick—jest sort of on general principles."

Hardly had Gallopin' put durance vile behind him than he saw a familiar face. It was Shorty Oliver, the Circle X cowhand, whom he had met that unlucky morning in The Yellow Dog Lunch Room. Shorty's friendly, exuberant smile broadly hinted that its owner might know something about the fake telephone message that had sent the Sagebrush sheriff on the trail of the fictitious bandit.

Gallopin' fell on Shorty's neck and embraced him as a long-lost brother.

"Why, shore," chuckled Shorty in answer to Gallopin's question, "it was me done it! I rode into town this mornin' and heard from some of the Box A gang that yuh was still workin' fer the widder. Now when them two birds pulled that job joke on yuh that mornin' I didn't know the joke but, after bein' wised up, yuh understand, I knowed that workin' a month fer that widder yuh was a gone goose, unless I could save yuh. So I kinder figgered out that scheme——"

"Say!" broke in The Gallopin' Kid. "I didn't know until this mornin' that she had her own private buryin' ground fer husbands on the back of her place. Tell me, Shorty, does she—p'isin 'em?"

"Worse'n that," answered Shorty Oliver, "she works 'em to death. I

reckon she figgers that marryin' 'em is a good way to save payin' wages.

"Now git yore horse, old-timer, and we'll be ridin' out to Circle X. Times has got a little better than they was a month back and there's a job out there fer a good hand."

With a gesture of affection and gratitude, The Gallopin' Kid put his arm across Shorty Oliver's shoulder.

"Pardner," he said warmly, "I don't know how I'm ever goin' to get even with you unless mebbe you git mixed up with one of them three-time widders yourse'f some time. All right, Shorty, let's hit the trail."

A MIDNIGHT RESCUE IN THE YOSEMITE

FOLLOWING a straight and narrow path is supposed to bring the pathfinder to a happy ending, but sometimes that ending may be unfortunately delayed, as is shown by the following anecdote of two girl school-teachers who went hiking in the Yosemite. With two companions, the girls set out on a hiking trip from Lindsay, California, and went first to Vernal Falls. Their escorts were Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Hitchcock of Lindsay. Mr. Lindsay, also a school-teacher, is employed by the national-park service as a naturalist in Rainier National Park in the summer.

At Vernal the Lindsays turned back, and the two girls continued their walk to Nevada Falls, six miles farther, and thence up a precipitous trail to Glacier Point. From there they attempted to find their way down the narrow trail that leads from the Point, some 3,400 feet above the floor of the valley. It was after dark when they began the descent, and to add to the perils of the journey the trail was covered with snow and the girls were the first persons to attempt the walk this year. Following the path, they walked out on a blind ledge, which ended suddenly in a sheer drop of nearly half a mile to the valley below. They attempted to turn back, but found that the rocks and boulders which they had surmounted with ease on the downward path were impossible of ascent. They pressed themselves against the cliff on the narrow ledge and shouted for help.

Fortunately they were heard by some rangers in the valley below and a party of five men came to their aid. It was midnight before the rescuers, toiling over the hazardous trail, reached a spot some one hundred feet above the girls. From a narrow ledge, one of the men, John Bingaman, was lowered with ropes and the girls were pulled up to safety in turn, the ranger coming last. Except for fright and exposure to the chill mountain winds the girls were uninjured, but it is not likely that they will forget this experience. One of the young women was Miss Edna M. Wilbur, daughter of the secretary of the navy. Her companion was Miss O. E. Ring of Lindsay.

The Old Border Towns

By Marshal South

WHEN the North wind sweeps down with the cloud wrack,
  And the fogs drive across from the bay,
When the sun is gray-veiled, like a phantom,
  And the rain shrouds down on the day—
It is then that my thoughts all turn southward
  To the land of the purples and browns;
To the land where the wind stirs the dust clouds
  In the streets of the south Border towns.

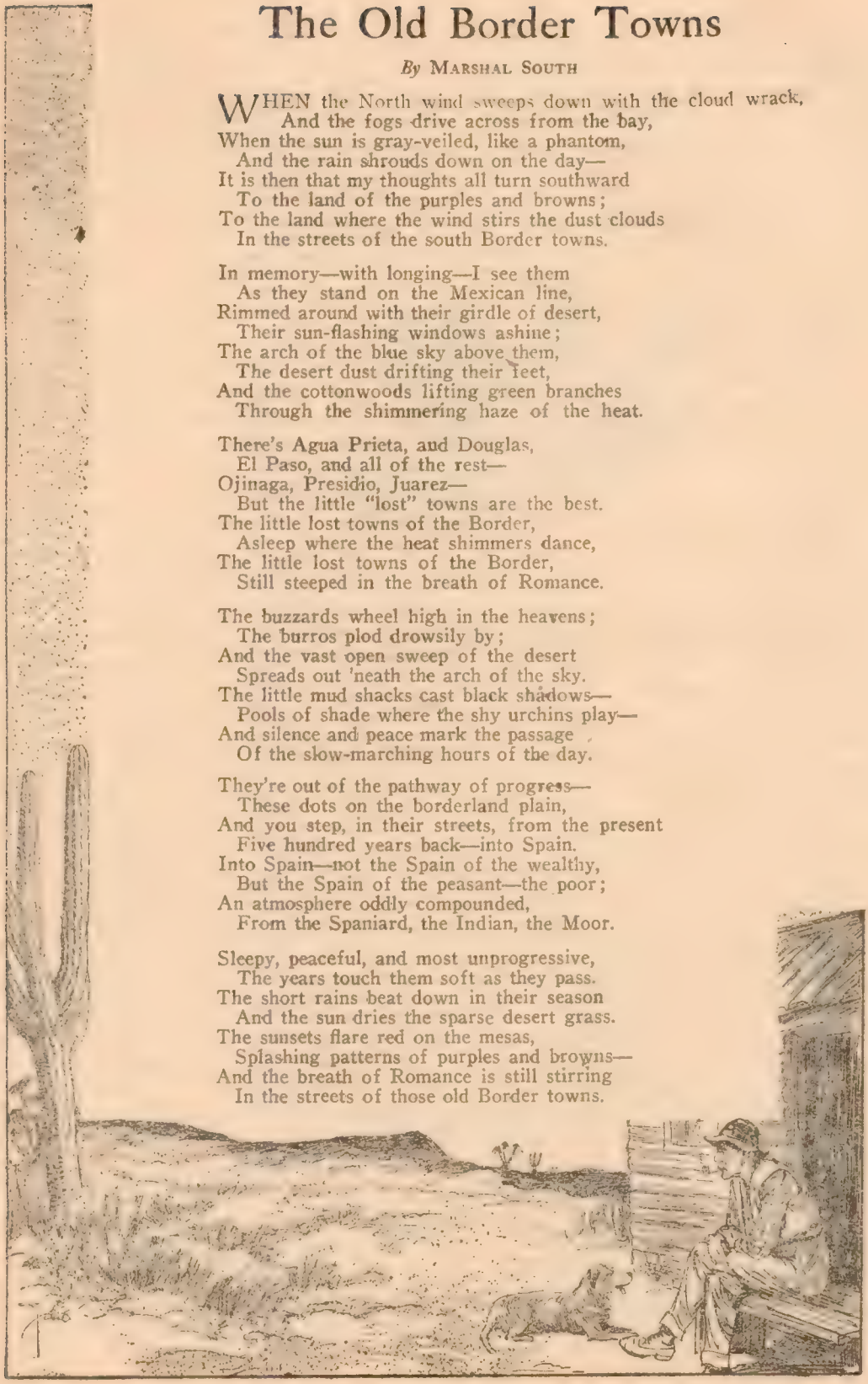
In memory—with longing—I see them
  As they stand on the Mexican line,
Rimmed around with their girdle of desert,
  Their sun-flashing windows ashine;
The arch of the blue sky above them,
  The desert dust drifting their feet,
And the cottonwoods lifting green branches
  Through the shimmering haze of the heat.

There's Agua Prieta, and Douglas,
  El Paso, and all of the rest—
Ojinaga, Presidio, Juarez—
  But the little "lost" towns are the best.
The little lost towns of the Border,
  Asleep where the heat shimmers dance,
The little lost towns of the Border,
  Still steeped in the breath of Romance.

The buzzards wheel high in the heavens;
  The burros plod drowsily by;
And the vast open sweep of the desert
  Spreads out 'neath the arch of the sky.
The little mud shacks cast black shadows—
  Pools of shade where the shy urchins play—
And silence and peace mark the passage
  Of the slow-marching hours of the day.

They're out of the pathway of progress—
  These dots on the borderland plain,
And you step, in their streets, from the present
  Five hundred years back—into Spain.
Into Spain—not the Spain of the wealthy,
  But the Spain of the peasant—the poor;
An atmosphere oddly compounded,
  From the Spaniard, the Indian, the Moor.

Sleepy, peaceful, and most unprogressive,
  The years touch them soft as they pass.
The short rains beat down in their season
  And the sun dries the sparse desert grass.
The sunsets flare red on the mesas,
  Splashing patterns of purples and browns—
And the breath of Romance is still stirring
  In the streets of those old Border towns.



Any Old Dog Will Do

By **Austin Hall**

Author of "Raining Bears," etc.

THE well-known sheep-herder and dog trainer de luxe, Jean la Jennette, shifted his battered tam-o'-shanter and gazed at the wizened gentleman in front of him.

"Is zat so?" he was saying. "You lak zat Rex, but you no lak for admit w'at he's worth. Hey? Ou la la! Mebbe so. But Jean la Jennette she's no give no leetle care about zat. Hey? But you watch an' see zat dog work."

And, with that, the stubby Basque waved his hand in a command that sent a flurry of black and tan around the big flock that had been waiting outside the shearing pens; a scurry of soft dust arose in the air, and simultaneously three thousand sheep took on the aspect of an animated blanket and began sifting through the gates. Behind them came the sharp *whoofs* of the wise old sheep dog, walking proudly and doing the work that was the happiness of his sheep-loving heart. A tinkling of bells arose upon the air, mingled with the strident *tong-a-tong* of the pack burro's bell. Up on the platform, a sheep-shearer stood up to gaze at the spectacle and shout a word at Jean la Jennette:

"Fine, Jean! That's just right."

But his words were lost on the cool spring air; Jean la Jennette had turned toward the fence and was climbing to the top rail. The little man who had been standing near him was gazing at the sheep pack, his eyes glittering and his thin nose twitching; altogether, the man was too much like a weazel to suit the sheep-herder.

"Yes, sir, my man," the gazer was saying. "He's a wonderful dog, I'll admit; but you see, I'm new to the sheep business. However, I know values, and worthy as the dog may be, I'd hardly be fool enough to part with real hundred-dollar bills for a hunk of dog flesh. I'm interested in making money. That's all. I know the wool market, and I propose to make a business of sheep raising. Any dog is good enough for me. About what would you say that wool clip will be worth?"

The herder on the fence looked down.

"Ou la!" came his answer. "W'at does Jean la Jennette know about zat? Hey? Zat ees for zee financier. So!

You know ze value. And you know you steal zat flock. For why should you ask Jean la Jennette!"

The scorn of the herder's voice was so pronounced that even the weasel-faced man could not but feel it. He turned and walked over to the spot where Bob Arnold, Jean's boss, was conversing with a group of sheepmen.

Jean la Jennette lit his cigarette and mumbled:

"He don't lak it, hey? But zat man is crook for sure. He steal zat flock from Jacques Puchu. Zat finance ees funny business. *Oui, oui,* yuh bet!"

And therein Jean la Jennette was saying a great deal. The only thing that Jean knew was that this man had somehow acquired the flock of Jacques Puchu. He had no knowledge of the correspondence that had passed between this man, J. H. Rosen, and old Jacques, nor of the value of a certain loan, the stipulations of which read in favor of the lender, and by which, on a certain date, a sum of money would have to be paid in gold or its equivalent at or upon demand. But Jean did understand some of the particulars that went with the bargain; and how, from that minute on, old Jacques had been pursued by various and assorted disasters, not the least of which had been the loss of hundreds of sheep. And when a sheep-herder loses a thousand sheep, all the profit drops out of the business.

It was a mystery that had not been solved. However, that was not the concern of J. H. Rosen. The note had not been met, and upon a certain date, after due process of law, the said J. H. Rosen had taken possession of the flock.

Only—and there the point stuck—the newcomer was far from the level of the average sheepman. He was small and stingy in character. His first act had been to discharge all the herders of the Puchu outfit, except one—a certain Tony Mendoza, the arch enemy of Jean la Jennette, and as crafty a herder as ever drove a sheep. The second act was to quarrel with Jacques Puchu over the value of his dogs. When Puchu had insisted that his dogs were worth a thousand dollars, the money lender had straightway gone up in the air and refused to accept them.

"Dogs!" he had laughed. "You must think I'm a fool. I wouldn't pay a thousand dollars for all the dogs in the country. Take them and welcome. Any sheep dog will drive sheep. That's all I want."

All of which had been the cause of Jean's dispute a few minutes before. Just now the old herder was watching Rosen approach the group where Bob Arnold was holding forth; he saw the broker step up and spread out his hands; there was something in the act that made Jean's old heart boil.

"Ou la," he muttered, "zee crook for sure! He steal zat flock somehow. But Jean doesn't know how. He no lak sheep; not him. He lak zat money; and Jean's thinking zat he would kill a man for one cent. Also zat fellow he's fired all zee herder, and he keep zat Tony Mendoza. Ou la! Something funny 'bout zat. Nodder crook. I lak for some day to punch hees face."

Whether the wish was the father to the fact, there is no way of telling; but, just at that moment, Jean straightened up on the rail. Down below him, the last sheep had entered the inclosure, and the old dog, Rex, had started back, bob tail up and proud as a peacock, to his place in the shade. But simultaneously a heavy figure slipped around the corner and heaved a rock at the dog. Jean instantly recognized the form of Tony Mendoza. He leaped from the fence and raced as fast as his stubby legs would carry him straight at his enemy. And Tony was waiting; his heavy fist went out and spun Jean half around; another blow followed, but neither one stopped the irate sheep-

herder. A yell went up. Twenty-five herders came on the run, and, in the twinkling of an eye, the two forms were rolling over and over on the ground like a brace of wild cats. Around and around! The herders were delighted; it was the old, old battle between Tony and Jean la Jennette, and, if nothing separated them, it would be going on for hours. But just then Jean's boss, Bob Arnold, came up and seized him by the collar.

"Here, here!" he snapped. "What do you mean? Jean, I'm getting sick of this. Every year you think you've got to lick somebody. What's the matter?"

But Jean la Jennette was too mad to talk. One of Tony's eyes was closed, and his nose was bleeding; it looked very much as though he had been deprived of the beating of his life. He gave one look at the bystanders and then sneaked off, leaving Jean la Jennette to give the explanation.

"So!" Jean was exclaiming. "You bet! Zat crook, hey? Throw rock at zat Rex. I keel him for sure. You wait, you see. Ou la la!" Then he suddenly spotted the wizened form of Rosen. The sight seemed to drive him into a fury; he gave a leap that set him free of his captors and swung a blow at the other's jaw. "Ou la!" he cried. "I keel you, too. Thief, hey? Ou la!" But the blow had fallen short, and before he could repeat it, the strong arms of Bob Arnold had pinioned him against the fence. Five minutes later, the big sheepman was explaining to the wan and frightened Rosen.

"You mustn't mind Jean la Jennette," he was saying. "He's the quickest-tempered little sheep-herder in the country. Goes off like a flash of gunpowder. And, besides, he and Tony Mendoza have had a feud for years. You'll have to admit that Tony threw the rock on purpose. And—well, Jean la Jennette would fight the devil himself over his old dog. But there isn't a better herder on earth than old Jean."

The wan Mr. Rosen was still trembling; also, he was thinking; apparently, he had learned a lot.

"It's all right," he said after a moment. "I understand all about it. Only I never saw anything so remarkable as the fussiness of you sheepmen when it comes to the value of a dog. Dogs! I got two of them for ten dollars. They're good enough for me. What do I want with prize winners?"

This sudden twist in the conversation had set Bob Arnold to thinking; he did not say anything; but down in his heart he was hoping that some day the shrewd wool buyer would learn something about dogs.

But all this was merely an incident of the shearing season; the fight was soon forgotten, and in due course of time Jean was up in the mountains on the annual pasturage of the great flock. The months had dragged by with the usual taste of Sierra paradise—the dim, green forest, the whispering trees, and the limpid waters of the mirrored lakes; the great sheep pack had wandered over the soft pastures, growing fatter and fatter, and browsing to its heart's content. Great days for Jean la Jennette, with not a thing to worry him—silent days, with no sound but the tinkling of the sheep bells and the barking of old Rex. In a place like that, a man's soul is soon washed of hard feeling; Jean was not thinking of his enemies. Now and then, a thunderstorm would pass over the heights and filter off into sunshine; snow lay upon the peaks, and all was well. But finally a dry period set in; the browse was consumed, and at length the time came when Jean was about to make the drive to the highest pastures of the Sierras. Up near the snow and along the little lakes, he would find the best feed in the mountains.

However, to reach it, he would be

compelled to pass through a difficult country, cut with canyons, and draws, and steep passes, where the timber was stunted and the brush lay along the mountains in a furry growth that spread for miles. The way lay along the ridges and then up the river bed to the last great lift of the Sierra wall. Jean started out at daybreak and sent his old dog, Rex, after the flock.

"Ou la!" he called happily. "To-day we go to see zee high countree. So! Ou la la! Rex, you catchem."

Each year it had been the same, and there was nothing to warn him that this year would be any different. The dog went after the flock, the pack burro kicked up his heels, and the last leg of the great drive was on. Jean was as happy as his old dog. For two days they went along, driving slowly so as to allow the flock to partake of the scanty herbage that grew along the route; the dust arose in a cloud, and soon they were in the driest and most deadly part of the mountains. Apparently, the little grass that there was had been starved for water; the leaves under the trees were dead and crackling; and, to make matters worse, the sun had come out with burning intensity. According to Jean's calculation, it had not rained in this part of the mountains for weeks. That meant danger—danger at any moment, and Jean knew it.

But he went on and on. The third day dawned, and about eleven o'clock, just as he was getting ready to halt the drive for a few hours' rest, he perceived Rex stopping and sniffing along the side of the ridge; and when his dog did that, Jean knew there was something in the wind. So he walked to the edge of the clearing and looked over the walls of the canyon, where a tinkle of bells drifted from the depths—bells and barking. That meant sheep, and the sheep could be none other than the former flock of Jacques Puchu. For a moment, the sheep pack was lost to view; then he watched it emerging from a depth of alders, hitting for the side of the hill, with the dogs rushing frantically behind. In an instant, Jean la Jennette was smiling. One look, and he was gloating over the discomfiture of his enemy, Tony Mendoza. The dogs were making a mess of it; the flock would mill, and the herder was swearing. Each foot was being gained with difficulty.

"Ou la!" cried Jean la Jennette exultantly. "Any dog will do for drive sheep! Hey? You bet! Zat Tony have trouble for climb zat mountain. Ho-ho-ho!"

Nothing could have suited him better than the sight in front of him; the flock was in trouble half the time; twice the dogs met in full career and started fighting; and each time Jean watched the irate Tony tearing them apart.

"She's fine flock," he gloated. "Ten dollar for them dogs! Hey? She's too much. Jean wouldn't give ten cents for both of 'em. Wonder how zat Tony laks hees new boss, hey?"

But the flock had reached the height at last, and passed over to the other end of the ridge; when they were well out of sight, Jean finished his lunch and resumed the drive. That night he camped at the head of a long canyon from which he could look down over miles and miles of moon-swept landscape. He kept thinking about Tony Mendoza and those dogs; and he was wondering how Tony liked it; the thought brought the picture of the great flock back; suddenly he straightened up.

"Ou la!" he muttered. "She's beega flock. More beeg zan she was las' spring at zee shearing pen. Mebbe so zat feller she buy more sheep."

And twice that night he rolled over in his blankets to listen to the sound coming up the ridge—bells! Tony Mendoza was not far away; but Jean

would beat him by many hours, unless something happened.

However, as it turned out, something did happen—a thing far from the calculation of Jean la Jennette. Next morning he started early, expecting to reach the lakes and lay up for an easy rest; but just as he was crossing a bit of brushland, a wisp of color arose in the air below him. Simultaneously, a wind swept down from a high pass. In two minutes, the streak of color had widened and twisted into a curtain.

Fire!

Instantly Jean realized the danger. He was at the head of a series of canyons, some of them leading into the parallel ridges of the Sierras, and only a few of them running straight out. The breeze had been gentle all morning, but with the impetus of the fire's vacuum, it suddenly increased to a hurricane. Streaks of burning leaves swept across the heights, dropping firebrands and setting new fires. The roar struck the air, muffled and whizzing, like crackling grain. Jean stopped; the dog was all attention, growling and looking back at his master.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the sheepherder. "W'at you know about zat? She's come lak zee devil on a bad night. One, two, three, four mile! We never can reach zee lake. Too high. No can do. Ou la la! Hey, Rex!"

He had turned and started the old dog after the flock; one sweep of his arm, and he had the trained shepherd running. The flock twisted, milled, and turned back. Head down and working his way through the smoke, Jean fought his way to the one and only ridge where he could escape. The fire crackled and zoomed; the undercurrent appeared to rock the hillsides. He was just in time to see a flying particle streak down upon a brush thicket close by the trail where he had been standing and set the mountain afire. In two minutes, the flame had been caught by the hurricane and borne up the heights.

"Ou la!" shouted Jean la Jennette. "Rex! Zat lazy sheep! For why she don't get a move on?"

Straight down the ridge, where there was a chance of getting through, the river lay below, and beyond the river was a stretch of bare country where he could outrun the conflagration. Jean yelled again.

"Zee rivaire, Rex! Ou la la! Zee rivaire! Zee rivaire!"

Each command had been louder and sharper than the one preceding; the dog barked and worked the flock for all he was worth; Jean was thanking his lucky stars that he had a dog like Rex. And that made him think of his rival, Tony Mendoza. Tony! Tony's dogs couldn't drive through calm weather! That flock! Sheep! Sheep! In an instant, Jean had forgotten all about his hatred for the man and was thinking about the flock of sheep. They didn't have a chance.

"Mon Dieu!" he muttered. "They burn for sure. T'ree t'ousand, four t'ousand fine sheep! Ou la la!"

Just then a flying brand struck behind him, went off with a sudden *zing* and started a new fire; but the noise was not strong enough to drown out another sound—sheep bells! Next instant, he ran into a strange sight. A panic-stricken flock and a pair of frightened dogs! A man was yelling; but he was not in sight. It was the voice of Tony Mendoza.

Jean had forgotten his animosity; he swung his arm again and started his trained dog in the direction of the stricken flock, heading through the pall of smoke and coming out on a boulder-strewn flat. Through the haze he could make out two things—first, his own flock, and then that of another. All under a smoke of death. Not a moment to lose! Tony's dogs were running aimlessly, and the sheep were

milling; added to that, there was no herder—just a man's voice.

"I guess I'm done for! I can't go no more. I'm broken to pieces for sure!"

The voice was plaintive and frenzied; but Tony Mendoza's beyond a doubt. Jean was fairly racing to get near; three leaps, and then he started running to a boulder where he saw a man lying on his side. The man turned and twisted, and saw Jean la Jennette. His hands went up in terror.

"Jean la Jennette!" he wailed. "Now you have your chance! You kill me if you wish."

But he did not know Jean la Jennette. The stubby sheep-herder had halted, stooped down, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Non, non!" he yelled through the din. "We have no fight now. Jean's your friend. W'at zee mat? Oh, zee leg, hey? Fall down, hey? Mebbe so break?"

There was no doubt of it; broken or twisted, the limb refused to hold the man's weight. Tony Mendoza groaned and fell back against the boulder.

"I was running too fast," he explained. "And I slipped and fell across that rock. I guess I'm done for. I can't get out. The fire will be here in a few minutes. You better go quick. Them sheep——"

That brought something to Jean's mind; he turned to look for his burro; but the sheep were too far ahead; he saw the two flocks coming together. The dogs of Tony Mendoza were practically worthless in a moment like this; but there was no reason why Rex could not handle the flocks. Once more Jean whistled and waved his arm at his dog.

"Ou la!" he yelled, sweeping his hand frantically to indicate the other flock. "Take 'em, Rex! Ou la la. To zee rivaire! To zee rivaire!"

No sooner commanded than carried out. The dog whirled, circled the new flock, and drove it into the pack of Jean la Jennette; like water running into water, the two flocks mingled and became one; and then as one solid pack obeyed its master. The other two dogs ran around, half helpless, and frightened; one of them raced against Rex and was thrown into the air for his negligence. The old dog had no time for foolishness. Next instant, old Rex was master of the flock and the two dogs as well. The great mass was moving straight to the edge of the ridge, and then down toward the river. Fortunately, the fire had not yet hit this particular part of the mountain; the way was still open. Out of the corner of his eye, Jean watched the disappearing flock.

"So!" He spoke to the wondering Tony. "Zat dog will get 'em through. You wait, you see! And you have zee broken leg. But Jean she's got two good feet. *Le bon Dieu,* she nevair forget Jean la Jennette. Mebbe so, if we hurry, we kin get out. You t'ink so mebbe you can hold on Jean's back? Better get up 'gainst zat rock. So! Now you put zee arms about Jean's neck. So! Now yuh get it and we go."

There was no time to delay; the fire was everywhere. The smoke obscured the way in front of them; but Jean shouldered his burden and staggered out, tottering and swaying, half falling, through the brush, and down the hillside. Down, down the mountain; sometimes he almost fell, but each time he managed, somehow, to hold his balance. The snapping behind him told where the fire had reached the spot they had just left. Streaks of flame would shoot up and string along where the wind had carried the fire into a pitch pine; the noise would sound like a thousand rockets. But still he kept going. He had ceased to think about the sheep; the dog would take care of them; he could hear the man on his

back talking in a mumbling tone, half hysterical, half pleading:

"No good, Jean. I'm only holding you back. You'd better run for your life. I—you and me have had many fights. For why are you trying to save Tony Mendoza?"

But Jean did not answer; he was having other things to think about. Down, down, he went; until at last the wind shifted for an instant and gave them a view of their bearings. And it was fortunate that it did! They had come to the edge of a slide that ran slantwise to the river; a few more steps, and they would have plunged over the brink. There was no time to go around it, and so Jean took the only recourse left.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed. "We almost fell. If we had gone head first, we would 'a' got kill' for sure; but mebbe so we kin go down backward."

It was a long chance; but it was the only one left. Jean took in the odds at a glance; then he spoke to his companion.

"So!" he exclaimed. "You tak hold of Jean's neck jus' lak before. Savvy? Jean she's going tuh lay on his belly and slide down. You ride on hees back. So, now!"

Once more they were just in time; the wind had shifted again, and the hurricane of flame had hit the mountainside. Jean worked his feet to the edge, shoved himself over, and let go. Instantly there was a scurry of sand and débris. *Swish! Zip!* Like a streak they were on their way. Down, down, with Jean holding his hands against the surface of the slide to guide the descent. Faster and faster! The skin was worn from Jean's palms, and his clothes were torn away; but there was no stopping. And then, *kerplunk,* it ended! The river was beside them the river with its stretch of bottom lands and the safety of the waters. They might be suffocated, but they could not burn; and now the wind and the hurricane were far above them. In two minutes, Jean had straightened up and was ready to go on. The flock had disappeared, and there was no way of locating it; but Jean answered Tony's questioning glance.

"Non, non!" he exclaimed. "I know zat dog. She's ver' smart, and she's know too much. Ou la la! Some place he mak' zee rivaire. You wait; you see."

And, sure enough, just as they were rounding the third bend, they came across the flock. The dog was driving a spent and worried pack along the edge of the stream, but he had reached the lower end of the fire and was safe. The bells were tinkling, and the burro, feeling, no doubt, that it was time to return to the valley, was leading the way. Jean caught the pack animal and, after a few twists and maneuvers, deposited Tony Mendoza on his back. After that, they headed downstream.

"So!" cried Jean la Jennette. "She was fast time, for sure. Zat burro ees just ze t'ing! So! Let ze fire burn. To-night we head for zee Wilson Ranch and send for doctor. So!"

But that was not all; the end came three days later when Bob Arnold, warned about the fire, came up to the mountains, where he found J. H. Rosen, Tony's boss, already on the ground. Rosen appeared to be worried and somewhat glum.

"You see," he explained, "I should have bought better dogs. It appears that I would have lost the entire pack, had it not been for the wonderful driving of your old Rex. I've been talking to Mr. Wilson, and I'm just about convinced of the reason for the high cost of sheep dogs. You see——"

But, just at that moment, Arnold spotted his old herder, Jean la Jennette; he saw him motioning with his finger; but he could not understand his words.

"Didn't I tell you?" Jean was saying.

"Zat Mr. Rosen he ees w'at you call ze crook. So! You talk to Tony Mendoza. He has something for tuh say. So!"

Bob could not understand; but when he returned again, his face was somewhat clouded. He called Jake Wilson and asked for some paper. Then he sent for J. H. Rosen. When that worthy appeared, he shoved the paper, covered with writing, in front of him.

"Sign here," he said, and his voice was as cold as ice. "Right on the dotted line. Or, maybe, I'd better explain. This is a bill of sale for four thousand sheep, free of encumbrances of any sort, to Jacques Puchu. Do you understand that?"

A snort of indignation was the answer.

"All right!" said Arnold, as if he had expected this. "Then I'll explain. Tony Mendoza has just confessed before witnesses. Do you get that? Perhaps you remember, Rosen, that you loaned Jacques Puchu some money? How about it? Well, Tony Mendoza has simply spilled your beans. He has admitted that, after negotiating the loan to Jacques Puchu, you proceeded to hire Tony to wreck the flock. In other words, Tony stole a thousand head and drove them to your man in Nevada. And that was enough to ruin old Jacques Puchu. It was clever work; but in this State it's called grand larceny of the grandest sort. So! Well, I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt. You can either go to the pen or sign this paper. Savvy? And the money that you loaned to Jacques Puchu—well, that goes with the paper. High cost of sheep dogs! Well, I'll say! If you hadn't been so stingy with your dog money, this might never have happened. How about signing this paper?"

J. H. Rosen signed.

AFTER MR. JACK RABBIT

AN important feature of the New Mexican's daily menu is now apt to be rabbit in one of its many appetizing forms. The reason for this particular diet is that extensive drives are being conducted throughout the Southwest—but particularly in New Mexico—to rid the ranches and plains of jack rabbits. Fifty thousand of them have been killed by farmers and ranchers of New Mexico in the last few months, and the slaughter is to continue.

It is conservatively estimated that drives against the long-eared denizens of the plains have already saved enough grass and hay for almost six thousand cattle or for seventeen thousand sheep. The calculations are based upon the contention that eight of the rabbits eat as much as one cow and three times as much as one sheep.

At a recent convention of the New Mexico Cattle and Horse Growers' Association it was stated that the millions of jack rabbits in the State present a greater menace to live stock than do coyotes, and that they are a source of greater damage to the range than any other agency. In view of these alarming facts, the United States Biological Survey was asked to coöperate in the extermination of the animal.

So keen is the interest in this project that in many communities merchants send their clerks to aid the farmers in their work, since they expect to benefit from the agriculturists' increased prosperity, if the number of jack rabbits be reduced. Sometimes the hunts take on the aspect of a picnic, for which bountiful lunches are prepared by the wives and daughters of the ranchmen.

Oh, Yuh Dummy

By *Ray Humphreys*

Author of "Shorty, Yellow Calf, and Sparrow Legs," etc.

THE sleek, well-dressed gentleman, whose face looked as if he had just come from a barber shop, turned a worried pair of blue eyes on Sheriff Joe Cook in the latter's office in Monte Vista.

"This is the second letter, sheriff," said the prosperous-looking man, "and, I must admit, it's getting under my skin. I—I'm not particularly afraid, but I'm not going to pay any blackmail money—and I don't hanker to die right now."

The sheriff's frown deepened at that remark.

"O' course not, Mister Mannix," said Sheriff Cook. "No man wants to pay out hard cash to a scoundrel—an' no man is particularly anxious to rush off to twang a harp t'other side o' the Jordan; but yuh rest easy, sir, we'll git yuhr man."

Deputy Sheriff "Shorty" McKay looked up at that.

"Yes," he said, butting right into the conversation, "we'll git him, Mannix, that's a cinch—he's a local man."

Sheriff Cook made a wry face.

"Shorty, yuh'd do better to keep yuhr trap closed when yuh don't know wharof yuh're speakin'," snapped the sheriff abruptly. "It ain't a local man! It's some grafter from Denver—some city slicker an' gun slinger as has come down here to Monte to try to pull off somethin'. Let him try it—jus' let him try it!"

Mannix made a gesture of despair.

"That's just the point, sheriff," he protested, "I don't want him to try to carry out his threats. He might be a good shot! He might kill me, as he has promised! I'd rather—yes, much prefer—that you nail him before he tries to pull off anything."

The sheriff nodded briskly. He straightened up in his chair.

"Don't yuh worry, Mister Mannix," he said confidently, "we'll git him—yes, we'll have him jailed in the twinkle of a eyelash."

Mannix left. The bank opened at ten o'clock and Mannix was president

of the bank. In addition to that he was one of the real political powers in the county. He had brains, and personality, and plenty of money. It was because he had money that he had received two threatening letters, warning him that he must deposit five thousand dollars under a culvert on the Alamosa Road before such and such a time or else he would suddenly meet a bullet from an assassin's rifle. Mannix had turned both letters over to the sheriff, and for three days the sheriff and Shorty had been on the alert.

The sheriff waited, after the banker had left the office, for a full minute before he opened up on his luckless deputy.

"Shorty, yuh idjut!" he exclaimed tartly. "As ef it ain't bad enough, the situation as it is, without yuh goin' sayin' that the crook is a local man! That was a swell thing to say! Ef he's a local man why kain't we ketch him? Bah! I tol' yuh forty times an' I'm tellin' yuh once more, we're dealin' with a big-time crook—a city feller—a slicker—a desperado o' large caliber."

"Yes, sir," said Shorty contritely.

"'Yes, sir,' is right! Don't yuh suppose we would 'a' got a line on that handwritin' ef it was a local man writin' the letters? O' course! An' what local men have we who would try anythin' like this? Answer me that, yuh numskull! Tell me who——"

Shorty threw away his cigarette.

"Sid Vireen, fer instance!" growled Shorty, on the defensive.

"Sid Vireen, an innocent barber!" roared the sheriff. "A man who is as respectable as the day is long—a man who won't stand fer no drunkards or gamblers or loafers in his shop! That's the man yuh suspect, eh? Jus' because yuh has a personal grudge agin' him!"

"No," said Shorty, "I jus' mentioned him——"

"Oh, I know all about it!" whooped the sheriff hotly. "I remember yuhr row with Sid! Armistice Day, it was! An' yuh ridin' in the Legion parade as big as life itself. Yuh said Sid didn't lift his hat when the colors went by! Huh! Sid said he did. Sid said yuh was mad because he didn't lift his hat when yuh rid by."

"He lied!"

"Waal," said the sheriff, "yuh're on the wrong track, Shorty. When yuh mentioned Sid's name to me yesterday I went over to Grover Miller an' got the lease on the shop that Sid signed fer Grover, who owns the buildin'. Sid's handwritin' is nuthin' like the handwritin' in the letters—the bank fellers all agreed on that."

"It could be disguised!"

"Waal, it wasn't! The writin' ain't similar at all!"

"Waal, I say Sid is no good," insisted Shorty.

"Yuh're a dummy," exploded the sheriff suddenly, "jus' a plain, ordinary dummy! It ain't no local feller pullin' this job, nix! It's a outsider. I'll git him, by gum, ef I jails every stranger in Monte Vista, mark yuh down them words, Shorty!"

Another day brought another letter! In his third letter the writer declared that he would give the banker a couple more days "to kick through with the dough." The fifth letter, the blackmailer said, would be the last letter. If the five thousand dollars wasn't forthcoming immediately after *that* letter, then Mannix could order his funeral for the last of the week. Mannix came in, pale and trembling, and the sheriff made a few revelations.

"Mannix, we got a feller spotted! Leastwise, I has! There's a feller stayin' down to the Lone Spruce Hotel who is actin' mighty suspicious! I aim to nail him this mawnin' an' put the screws on him an' see who he is!"

"Yuh suspect him?" asked Mannix, in relief.

"Strongly," said the sheriff. "He

gives the name o' Bob Hayes, an' Denver as his home. I sent Shorty to wire Denver fer a line on him. As soon as I gets that—we nails Mr. Hayes. He's been actin' suspiciouslike."

"Good!" said Mannix approvingly.

"Thar is jus' one other stranger in town that I been lookin' sideways at," went on the sheriff, "an' he lit here night before last on the down train. He's a deaf mute. Yuh know—talks with his fingers—or tries to."

"Yes?"

"Yeh! But I don't figger him very strong. I've seen his handwritin' an' it don't look like the writin' in the letters! He come in here an' wrote me out a note, nice as yuh please, askin' whar he could git a job in town. Had a note from a feller in Conifer referrin' him to Sid's barber shop—an' I hears that Sid has put him on as a porter over thar. So I reckon he's out!"

Mannix nodded.

"This job isn't the work of any barber-shop roustabout," said the banker. "The writer of the letters is no fool! He says that if I even try to plant a dummy package and ambush him, he'll shoot me dead before I start firing. He's just guessing sixteen feet ahead of us all the way through, Cook."

Cook made a grimace.

"No, Mannix, he jus' thinks he is!" said the sheriff. "Yuh watch me git results. Now, keep yuhr shirt on! I figures——"

The door opened and in walked Shorty, a yellow slip of paper in his hand. He tossed the sheet to the anxious sheriff, who read:

"Never heard of Bob Hayes, claiming to be from this city. Has no official connection here. Signed:

"DAN GRIMES, Chief of Police."

The sheriff smiled grimly at Shorty.

"What did I tell yuh?" he demanded, almost joyfully. "That cookie Hayes is our man! I might tell yuh, Mister Mannix, that this Hayes bird let slip to the hotel clerk that he was a Denver detective! Huh! Took us fer a bunch o' rubes here! I'll detective him now—they don't know him in Denver. Shorty!"

"Yes, boss?"

"We're goin' up to pinch Hayes."

"Yes, sir."

Hayes was taken without trouble He would have been a fool to make trouble under such circumstances, seeing that the sheriff poked two guns in his stomach, while Shorty, with seeming indifference, slipped a pair of handcuffs on him. They took an automatic, a pair of handcuffs, and a badge off Hayes; and Mannix, the banker, who was present when the arrest was made, cried out exultantly.

"You cheap blackmailer!"

"What?" said Hayes, and might have said more if the sheriff had not taken him by the arm.

"We'll hear yuhr story in jail, brother," said Sheriff Cook. "Mr. Mannix, yuh kin come along an' hear the confession."

But Mr. Hayes made no confession. He declared stoutly that he was a Denver detective. He appeared greatly surprised when the sheriff sprung the fact that the chief of police in Denver had officially disowned him by telegraph. The sheriff grinned.

"Yuh took us fer fools down here," said the sheriff, "an' yuh'll find out different! A detective, eh? What was yuh figgerin' on detectin' in Monte Vista, may I ask?"

Mr. Hayes glowered sullenly.

"I was lookin' fer one William Bass, a robber," he said slowly, "an' I had a tip he was here. I guessed the local officers were asleep so I didn't disturb 'em. I was workin' out some clews."

The sheriff laughed outright.

"Local officers asleep, eh?" he repeated sarcastically. "Waal, we work in our sleep, brother! I hands yuh

pencil an' paper an' asks yuh to please write yuhr name on the paper."

Hayes wrote his name on the paper. The sheriff grunted.

"Same as yuh wrote on the hotel register," he said, "but that don't mean nuthin'. Yuh've disguised yuhr writin', no doubt. Now, Hayes, we know yuh ain't a detective, so yuh better come clean. What are yuh doin' in Monte Vista, an' didn't yuh write some letters to Mr. Mannix here, demandin' money?"

The detected Mr. Hayes glared at the sheriff.

"Aw, go to——" he began angrily, and then he changed his tune. "I'd like to telephone the Denver chief," he said, "an' git this thing straightened out. He never wired that I was an impostor! I tell yuh—why, look at my badge!"

"Yes, a purty badge," said the sheriff, "but yuh kin buy them fer a dollar fifty almost anywhars."

"Yuh're a fool!"

"Yuh're a crook," countered the sheriff, incensed, "an' yuh'll stay in jail until yuh confess! Ef yuh come clean an' plead guilty, I'll recommend to the jedge that yuh git a light sentence—two to three years in the penitentiary, mebbe—but ef yuh don't confess——"

"Two to three years in the pen!" exclaimed Mr. Hayes, and his face got very red. "Why, yuh ol' billy goat, ef I ever ketches yuh in Denver I'll throw yuh in jail so fast——"

"Yuh won't be in Denver very soon," broke in the sheriff. "Yuh'll be in the pen makin' little ones outa big ones. Shorty!"

"Sir?"

"Throw this bird in the cooler!"

"Yes, sir!"

After that ceremony was over, Shorty, the sheriff, and Mannix hurried to the hotel, where they searched Mr. Hayes' room. His luggage revealed nothing but clothing and an extra clip of cartridges. Shorty didn't seem to care and soon disappeared. The sheriff was disappointed. He had expected to find paper such as the letter writer had used. But there was no paper in Hayes' baggage. Mannix was not worried over that.

"He's too smart to carry such evidence with him," he said, "but I think you've nailed a mighty good suspect."

They grilled Hayes again later, but without result. Hayes claimed he had official documents in his bag at the hotel. Whereupon the sheriff called him a name that was short and ugly. After that Hayes shut up like a clam and refused to say anything, except to break in on the sheriff's tirade at intervals with the terse remark, frequently repeated:

"I'll git even fer this!"

The threats were lost on Sheriff Cook. He didn't even appear to hear them. He ordered Hayes back to a cell finally, and then the sheriff and Mannix went into conference. Mannix declared that he was ready to swear out a complaint against Hayes at once.

"Hayes is our man," said the sheriff triumphantly, "but he's hard. He's tryin' to bluff his way out. Waal, he won't! Imagine sayin' he had papers in his bag when he hadn't! Didn't he think we'd be smart enough to look thar? An' tryin' to claim he's a Denver detective in face o' the telegram we got sayin' he isn't!"

The sheriff swung in his chair and looked at Shorty, who had just come in and waited, without a word.

"Why so glum, Shorty?" asked the sheriff jocosely. "I reckon yuh're sulkin' because the blackmailer turned out to be a stranger, after all! Yuh was all fer sayin' it was a local man. Yuh was fer castin' blame an' accusation on pore Sid Vireen——"

"Sid Vireen, the barber!" exclaimed the banker. "Why, he's a depositor with the bank—a fine fellow, above reproach!"

Speak of the devil! The door swung wide and in walked Sid Vireen, the barber, and a stranger. The stranger had a blank look on his face. The sheriff recognized him at once as the deaf-and-dumb man who had been in looking for a job. The mute smiled blandly and Sid began to speak.

"The dummy here," said Sid, "wrote me a note sayin' that while I was out to supper yuh sent word yuh wanted to see me."

"Not me!" said the sheriff quickly.

"Why, the dummy here showed me a note sayin' fer him an' me both to be up to this office by eight o'clock!" said Sid.

"I never sent no note!" said the sheriff tartly. "The bird is goofy, Sid. We've got a blackmailer in jail—a feller name o' Hayes who has been sendin' letters to Mr. Mannix here."

"I swan!" said Sid, opening his eyes wide. "Waal, sheriff, ef yuh didn't send fer us, I guess we'll shove along—hey, dummy?"

Sid motioned energetically to the mute.

"Jus' a minnit, please!" said Shorty, rising from his chair as Sid made for the door. "Sid, I gotta ask yuh to please put yuhr hands up before I shoots yuh full o' holes."

"What?"

"Put yuhr hands up!"

Sid put his hands up in a hurry, and Shorty stepped around and jerked a gun from Sid's hip pocket before the sheriff or the amazed Mr. Mannix could do a thing. The mute, however, made no move at all.

"What the heck?" demanded the sheriff, catching his breath.

"I'm arrestin' Mr. Sid Vireen for attempted blackmail," said Shorty tersely. "He mailed a letter in a mail box at Fifth and Pecos Street at noon to-day. The dummy here is a witness."

Vireen's face went pale, but he held his chin high.

"We're enemies!" he declared. "You're tryin' to frame me!"

"The dummy here," repeated Shorty firmly, "is a witness. He saw yuh gettin' ready to mail the letter, Vireen. He offered to mail it fer yuh, reachin' fer it as yuh finished sealin' the envelope. He had some shoe blackin' on his fingers, on purpose. He made a smudge on the letter before yut got it away from him an' made him understand yuh were goin' to mail it yuhrself. The dummy heer kin identify the letter we has as the one yuh wrote. I stopped at Mr. Mannix's office after the noon mail had been delivered and asked his secretary to give it to me."

"The dummy!" cried Vireen. "What does that fool know?"

"Enough to send yuh to the penitentiary, Vireen!" spoke up the "dummy," in a fine, clear voice. "I saw yuh write the letter; I saw yuh mail it, after I had smudged it so I could identify it. I heard yuh an' yuhr Mexican barber friend discussin' the whole thing. The Mex was to do the killin', if it was necessary——"

The barber's eyes opened as wide as saucers when the "mute" began to speak. When he had finished, Vireen's eyes flamed. He snarled like a trapped animal.

"Framed me, eh?" he cried. "A fine friend DeWitt turned out to be! Sendin' a stool pigeon——"

"This gentleman," broke in Shorty, with a wave of his hand toward the dummy, who was grinning broadly, "is my good friend, Jack Barrett from Gunnison. He's deputy sheriff over thar. I wired him to come over here an' act a dummy while we got the goods on Vireen. He got over big. We've got our fancy barber blackmailer."

"But the letter he had to Vireen," began the sheriff.

"I forged it," said Shorty. "Yuh see, I had found out something about Vireen. I became suspicious when I

heard that he wouldn't let no one loaf around his place. Him an' his Mex barber were too thick. I figgered they were plannin' something crooked. Waal, I found out that Vireen knew this DeWitt bird over to Conifer. I found out all about DeWitt's criminal record, an' I got a specimen o' his handwritin', an' forged the note to Vireen recommendin' the dummy."

Shorty laughed at Vireen's amazement.

"A good writer can change his handwritin' easy," said Shorty, "an' that's what Vireen did. Oh, I got his whole record, boss. He's wanted in a great many places. His real name is Bass. Goes by that name at times. He's a forger, robber, blackmailer, an' anythin' else he happens to think of."

The sheriff leaned back in his chair and sighed.

"Then—who in heck is that Hayes bird we got in jail?"

"Him? Oh, he's a Denver detective," said Shorty, with another grin. "Yuh see, he landed here lookin' fer Bass, alias Vireen, on a tip he had. When I found that out I knowed we had to get busy with Hayes before he caught our man an' took him away from us. Yuh already suspected Hayes an' asked me to wire Denver askin' ef he was a officer thar. I wired——"

"But they denied it!" gasped the sheriff.

"Yep! Instead o' wirin' Denver, Colorado, I wired Denver, Texas," said Shorty, "knowin' Denver, Texas, would deny knowin' Hayes. Then, when yuh wasn't watchin', I stole Hayes' papers outa his bag. From them I found out fer sure that Vireen was Bass. So I dropped by the barber shop an' tol' my dummy friend to write Vireen a note sayin' we wanted to see both o' them over here."

The sheriff fanned himself with his hat.

"Good grief," he exclaimed weakly, "an' we jugged a real detective, after all! What'll I ever say to Hayes? How kin I explain? He'll jus' naturally sue us, an' go home broadcastin' what a bunch o' hicks we are!"

Shorty shook his head.

"Hayes ain't a bad feller," he said, "an' I made a bargain with him late this afternoon. I tol' him we'd get Bass fer him, an' deliver him, handcuffed, ef Hayes wouldn't say anything about what happened. Hayes will get the credit for grabbin' Bass. Bass will be tried in Denver, whar they have enough on him to send him over for years. I don't see why we should prosecute him here on an attempted case, costin' the county a lot o' money, an' causin' Mr. Mannix a lot o' unpleasant notoriety, when Denver has the goods on him an' kin put him in cold storage."

"I agree!" cried Mannix. "That's the best way out—let Denver take care of the fellow—we're rid of him, anyhow!"

"Shorty," said the sheriff, "yuh git the credit——"

"Only partly," cut in Shorty. "Yuh see, I might never have thought o' that dummy business ef it hadn't been fer yuh suggestin' it to me at the start o' the case. Yuh said to me something like 'Oh, yuh dummy!' an' the words kinda stuck! I got to thinkin' an'—but let's put Vireen in a cell an' turn Hayes out, eh?"

"The quicker the better!" said the sheriff, warmly.

The Round-Up

DID the boys do right? We mean those two fellows who left the guide. Remember, we told you the story. Last week, a lady told us that the boys were judged too harshly. Now comes R. A. N., 416 North Muskogee Avenue, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, who decides, as most folks did, against them:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I wish to say that the boys did wrong. They were pretty young, and while most of us at the age of eighteen or nineteen figure we know almost everything, and that we can take care of ourselves, we later know different.

"The guide being older, and insisting that they go, was probably two thirds of their reason for doing so. Yet even though he said he was going to die to get the boys to go, had one of them stayed with him and kept him warm, he probably would not have died for days, if at all. And the other boy could have taken most of the food and as little of everything else as possible and gone for help.

"Life is sweet to most of us, yet to desert a companion on the trail is about one of the lowest possible forms of cowardice. Even if it were not for the scorn of our friends, I believe life would be merely a miserable existence for one who knew that he had left a friend with life and strength in his body to die, with the knowledge that he had not tried to help him. And you may be sure that wherever such cowards go, if they are found out, if not actually turned out, they will be despised by all who know them.

"Had there been only one boy with the guide, I believe he should have done what he could and gone for help. But, there being two of them, I think one should have stayed and the other gone for help. If he became lost, then all would have died, but, should he have won through, then all would have lived.

"And what a difference such an action would have made to the characters of these boys! For self-confidence is half the battle of life, and, after a deed like that, I should think one would lose all confidence in himself.

"Yet, as I said, the boys were young and probably easily influenced by the guide, and, while they wanted to 'go it alone,' they were not the woodsmen

they thought they were, because they became lost when they left the guide and started home.

"The question, 'What would you have done?' can only be answered by placing oneself in the same position; but, in almost every instance, bravery and cool-headedness come through with banners flying.

"A few weeks ago, a man here started down a long, dangerous hill and broke the gears in his car. There was another man and two women in the car. Having no control over the car, he jumped, and so did the other man. One of the women guided it to the bottom of the hill, where it struck a tree and turned over. No one was seriously hurt, although the car was wrecked.

"A few years ago, I had a similar accident, and before the car was going fast enough to hurt anything, I let it go into the ditch at the side of the road. Neither the car nor any one in it was hurt."

H. S. Huffman, Buffalo, New York, wants some information, and he gives some, too:

"Old Man and Folks: Concerning your recent talk on the choice of horses, my limited experience leaves me only a guess as to whether the stallion, gelding, or mare is the best. I have read that the Arabs ride a mare whenever possible, while the gauchos consider it a disgrace to be seen riding anything but a stallion. So much for that.

"I wonder if you could answer the following questions in Round-up some evening? First, are there any mustangs left in the West to-day? Now, please don't tell me there are millions. I don't mean the wild mongrel scrubs that are making such nuisances of themselves at the present time. I mean the full-blooded descendants of the horses, brought over by the Spaniards, that roamed the prairie and deserts when the first settlers went West. Is any one trying to preserve this breed?

"What is Palomino? Does it refer to a breed or just a color?

"What is the difference between the Barb and the Arabian?"

Frankly, old boy, we don't know what a Palomino type of horse is. The Barb is one of a race of horses, noted for speed and endurance, brought to Spain by the Moors. A Barbary horse is related to the Arabian horse, but is not as fine a breed, by any means. The Arabian horse, native of Arabia, is an animal noted for its graceful build, speed, endurance, intelligence and spirit. The Arabian horse is the foundation of the thoroughbred running horse. You are right in saying the Arabian rides a mare in preference to a stallion or gelding. Also, the Arabian, unlike all other breeders, values the mare more highly than the stallion. It has been difficult to get the Arabians to part with their stallions for export purposes, but next to impossible to get a mare out of their country.

William Edward ("Wyoming Bill"), late of the F. L. Ranch, Laramie County, Wyoming, kindly supplies the words of a popular poem:

"Boss and Folks: I takes the unwanted pleasure of throwin' yuh-all a line or two. In several issues of the Western Story Magazine, I have noticed frequently from patrons of that most valuable and interesting magazine, numerous requests for the old-time poem, 'Utah Carroll.' I, being a Westerner, and from the rangeland, have ridden some myself, and am sincerely desirous of returning to dear

old Wyoming again, the same being my home State.

"Well, as I was saying, it made me feel kind of sorry to see the requests for 'Utah Carroll' go unanswered, so I am herewith sending you a copy of the poem, which I had typed out for our patient and generous readers.

"Thank you for the wonderful reading of the past."

UTAH CARROLL.

And as, my friend, you ask me what makes me sad and still,
And why my brow is darkened like the clouds upon the hill,
Run in your pony closer, and I'll tell you the the tale of
Utah Carroll, my pardner, and his last ride on the trail.
Midst the cactus and the thistles of Mexico's fair land,
Where the cattle roam in thousands, a-many a herd and brand,
There is a grave with neither a headstone, date nor name;
There lies my pardner, sleeping in the land from which I came.
We rode the range together, and rode it side by side;
I loved him as a brother, I wept when Utah died.
We were rounding up one morning, and our work was almost done;
The boss man's little daughter was holding on that side.
She watched. The cattle saw the blanket and they charged on a mad and fearless run.
And little Varro, seeing the danger, turned her pony apace,
And, leaning in her saddle, tied her blanket in its place.
In leaning, she lost her balance, and fell in front of that wild tide.
Utah's voice controlled the round-up. "Lie still, little Varro," he cried.
His only hope was to reach her at full speed,
And ofttimes he'd been known to catch the trail rope of his steed.
His pony reached the maiden with a firm and steady bound;
Utah swung from the saddle to the ground.
He swung out from the saddle, and I thought her safe from harm,
As he swung in the saddle to raise her in his arms;
But the cinch of his saddle had not been felt before,
And his back cinch snapped asunder.
And he fell beside little Varro. He picked up the blanket and swung it over his head and started across the prairie.
"Lie still there, little Varro," he said. Well, he got the stampeded cattle turned and saved little Varro, his friend.
Then he turned to face the cattle, and met his fatal end.
His six-shooter from its holster he quickly drew;
He was bound to die defending himself, as all young cowboys do.
His six-shooter flashed like lightning, the report rang loud and clear,
As the cattle rushed in and killed him, he dropped the leading steer.
And when we broke the circle, where Utah's body lay,
With many a wound and bruise, his young life ebbed away.
And in the future mornings, I heard the preacher say,
"I hope we will all meet Utah at the round-up far away."
Then we wrapped him in the blanket, sent by his little friend,
And it was that very red blanket which brought him to his end.

Max, here is another friend of yours. His name is "Chuckles of Highmore," and he hails from Highmore, South Dakota.

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I've been a reader of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for a bit better than two years. I snitched the first issue from a friend, but I buy 'em regular now, so that I can read them again and again. Say, boss, you've got a real magazine. None better, in my opinion. The first place I head for when we hit town is Harris' news stand and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

"Now, when 'A Reader from Western Oregon' bounced those words off my favorite author's head—why, I just simply flew off the handle. Max Brand is plumb all right, say I! If 'A Reader' doesn't relish the stories *he* writes—why, gee! There are lots of other good stories, aren't there?

"Hip! Hip! Hooray! for WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE!"

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

WHAT hombre wouldn't give half a lifetime to lead a gold-rush stampede! The little poke of gold dust may be panned along the banks of the Kuskokwim in Alaska. Or the lode of precious yellow metal may be uncovered in the fields of Rouyn—but the wonder of it all is to be there *in the making!*

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Everybody has heard of Rouyn—the Rouyn gold fields, about three hundred miles northwest of Montreal. But not every one has been there. And there aren't so many who can say they were there *in the making.* Yes, I was there on the Rouyn gold fields in the making, and I can tell you it was considerably different from what you'll find there now. Surprising how a town will spring up that way almost overnight. Now Rouyn boasts of about five thousand inhabitants. Four years ago Rouyn was woodland, in a vast wilderness.

Some of the bunk houses up that way now are pretty good places to bunk in, but when Rouyn was in the making, it was some different. Well I remember bunk house No. 20! There were a hundred and sixty-five of us hombres in the one room, and a den of polecats lived under the bunk house!

Well, folks, I've been all the way from Texas to Rouyn, and if there's anything I can tell you, fire away. ROY R. YOUMAN.

740 South Shelby Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

Along the banks of the Kuskokwim.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have floated down the St. Lawrence River in eastern Canada; I have fished for pearls on the Mississippi, and I have prospected for gold on the banks of the Kuskokwim in Alaska. I was born some twenty-odd years ago, and have been all over the North American continent, as well as a few other places on the globe. I'd like especially to hear from other hombres of the same brand. JACK HOLMES.

1746 Twenty-second Avenue, East, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

The Red Lake gold rush.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: If some of you hombres who think that all Canada is a frozen tundra wilderness would drop me a line, I will tell you different. I've been across it from coast to coast, and from the Great Lakes to Alaska. To any one who writes, I'll tell them about the Red Lake gold rush, for I was there and helped to make a crowd.

ALEXANDER DALRYMPLE.

137 Gowan Avenue, Toronto 6, Ontario, Canada.

Round-up Road, somewhere in Montana.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a cowgirl—not too old for any one around sixteen to write to, and not too young for any from twenty-five down to write to, so come on, Gang, and give me the school yell in the form of letters!

I am now living in Washington, but Mon-

tana is my State, and I will be going back there before very long. Our ranch was about thirty-five hundred acres in size, and we had from two to three thousand steers. We always had a string of twenty broken horses. And there were so many wild ones in that part of the country that if you tried to count them you actually got a headache.

Out around Round-up Road the cowboys are as numerous as service stations in Washington. Our place was located out by the Round-up Road, and many exciting things have happened on Round-up Road. It sure is one spooky road to find yourself on even in the daylight.

When I was about seven years old a young college chap came to our ranch and asked for a job. We were short of hands, and so he got a chance. They called him green, but that hombre was a tophand before he quit, and he sure saved my mother from biting the dust on one occasion.

Have you ever seen a tumbleweed, folks? Well, a tumbleweed is usually from two to three feet high, and looks something like a greasewood bush, and when a tumbleweed blows in front of a horse it sure has started something. This particular tumbleweed made the mount go into about all the jumping and running stunts that horses can get into, and in another moment mother would have been thrown, if it hadn't been for the tenderfoot on our ranch. Yes, that tenderfoot sure did learn to handle horses. And I want to tell you he doesn't do so badly when it comes to rodeo riding, either.

On this range the sheepmen and the cowmen still have it in for each other, and the bunk house is where you can hear the yarns.

COWGIRL FROM MONTANA.

Care of The Tree.

The Colorado Rockies.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've had the good fortune to be on ranches high up in the Rocky Mountains. Plenty of fresh air and mountain scenery here, and all I need to make my comfort and pleasure complete are a few pen pards. I'm at present in a small sawmill camp in Colorado. C. B. MAHAFFEY.

Rand, Colorado.

The wheat belt.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We, my pard and I, would like to hear from the wheat-belt country, as we're planning to work in the wheat fields this year. Let's hear *muy pronto,* folks.

O. C. STEINBACH.

Curtiss Avenue, Joliet, Illinois.

Beaver Island.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There are many interesting facts to be told about the island and river life here. I live on Beaver Island, situated in the middle of the Mississippi River, between Albany, Illinois, and Clinton, Iowa. However, I'm an Iowan.

EVERETT WAGNER.

Clinton, Iowa.

We can't all be gold-rush leaders, but we can all take first place in the stampede of true fellowship. The good-fellowship badge of friendship is The Hollow Tree badge.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

Rancher.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm an old-timer here in this part of the country. I have a good-sized ranch and am not bothered by too many neighbors—in fact, there's plenty of vacant land hereabouts. This is a good game country, and there's lots of fishing, too. To my mind the best fishing in the country is in the Rogue River.

Well, folks, I'm all alone on this here ranch and waiting for some true-blue pards to come along. C. R. BREWER.

Box 25, Hugo, Oregon.

Northern Minnesota.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Although I'm in Chicago at prsent, my home State is Minnesota and any one interested in the northern part of that State will find that I'm pretty well up on it. I'm a lover of the outdoors. Have four saddle horses, and wish I had a lot more.

My next move will be out to New Mexico, so a few lines from that part of the country will be received with great welcome.

JEANNETTE C. LAMOREAUX.

Care of Mrs. J. Cloonan, 5509 Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Washingtonians.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Can you help us to get some pen pals from Arizona? We, my husband, children, and myself, are taking a trip to Arizona this fall and would like very much to get some letters telling us about that glorious State.

My husband works in one of the lumber camps here, and that leaves me plenty of time to get lonesome. Would especially like to hear from Arizona mothers.

MRS. H. G. KEITHLY.

125 West Eklund Avenue, Hoquiam, Washington.

Alaska.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live in Ketchikan, the "first" city of Alaska. I've called this my home for the past four years, and before coming here the other twelve years of my life were spent in Missouri. I must say that Alaska is my choice.

I'll be very glad to hear from any one wish- to exchange snaps, and will promise to answer every letter. HASTELENE WALKER.

Box 1672, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Although only seventeen, this Gangster has lived in seven of our States and is hoping to travel through many others before the year is out. He would like to find a pard who will go West with him this summer. Fred Perry's address is R. F. D. 28, Beloit, Wisconsin.

Another Gangster looking for a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a young fellow of twenty-three who has lived in the East for eight years and is hankering to find a pard and go West. I think two square-shooting hombres could make a go of it out there.

E. JOSEPH FORTIER.

West Point, New York.

"I would appreciate any information on fur farming, especially on the care of chinchilla rabbits and muskrats," says Justin Ryan, 4355 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois.

"Would like to get in touch with a prospector-miner, as I'm hoping to find a pard and get into the game," says Arthur Percifield, 505 Clay Street, Cedar Falls, Iowa.

"I'd like to exchange a few words with the Western hombres, as it's my greatest wish to go out there when my time is up in the army. I'm serving out here in the wilds of India," says Bandsman J. Dolain, 1st Battalion, Rifle Brigade, Wellington Lines, Jullemar, India.

"Would like to find somebody to exchange cowboy yarns for sea yarns," says Joseph W. West, U. S. S. *Arizona*, Box C., San Pedro, California. Hombres, get in touch with West.

C. M. K., care of the Tree, would like to hear from the Oklahomans of the Gang. He plans to visit the Indian reservations this year.

"I live in one of Australia's beauty spots, and, taken all around, Aussie is rather a lovely place," says Ruth Cram, "Wyuma," Rixon's Pass, Woonona, New South Wales, Australia. This Gangster would like to exchange snaps and cards with all parts of our country.

Sixteen-year-old Isabelle E. Olson, Box 195, Oxbow, Saskatchewan, Canada, would like the opportunity of telling you-all about her uncle's ranch. Girls, here's your chance to learn about ranch life.

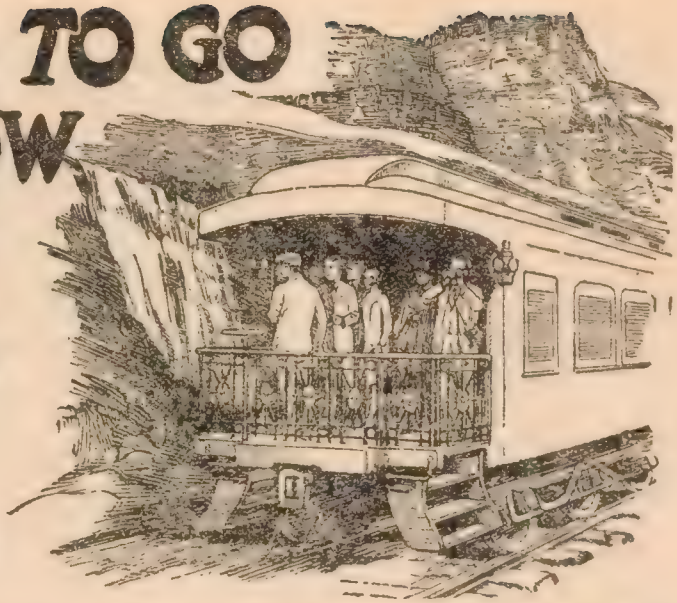
"I am a genuine Oregoner, and although I'm not living in that section of Oregon where our friend the cowboy roams, I love the West. I'm going to Colorado and Texas this autumn, and will write you-all later about my trip," says Hilda B., care of the Tree.

"I want all the information I can get on Washington and Oregon States, as I am planning to go there and farm," says A. R. Byers, Route A. Elkhart, Kansas.

B. E. Wolfe, 734 North Commercial Street, is an Inglewood, California, Gangster who is looking for some pen pals from the East.

Thorpe, West Virginia, is a mining camp, and fourteen-year-old Irene Borbely, Box 243, can tell you all about it.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE



by *John North*

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THERE surely are a lot of hombres interested in the Apache State, among whom is Ned T., of Providence, Rhode Island. "I'm an Easterner born and bred," writes this citizen of "Little Rhody," "but I've got a great desire to take a look at the West. I'm planning on hitting the trail for Arizona soon and I wish you would tell me some of the sights to be seen in that part of the world."

Well, we don't think we can do better by Ned than to let him read the following letter from L. D. W., of Tucson, Arizona. "I note your remarks in a recent issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE regarding Chiricahua National Monument and the weird-shaped monuments therein," writes this Westerner. "Now, I am a constant Arizona booster and I'd like to say a few words about this State. There are hundreds of these monoliths in this park and many curious formations may be found elsewhere in southwestern Arizona.

"There are many geological curiosities in the Dragoon Mountains near by, Cochise Stronghold being one of them. This is where Cochise took refuge with his band of hostiles when hard pressed by the soldiers, and so far as I know he was never run out of this pocket in the mountains. When the visitor gets into the Chiricahua Mountains he is not far from Tombstone, one of the most noted Western towns, made famous in a very few minutes by the Earp-Clanton fight of September, 1881, wherein two of the McLowery brothers and Billy Clanton were killed at or near the entrance of the O. K. Corral, several others of the participants being wounded.

"The native boulder monument erected two miles to the north of town on the spot where Ed Scheffelein camped at the time he made the gold strike which put Tombstone on the map is worth seeing. So also is the old Boot Hill just outside the city limits,

where the good and the bad met to embark on the one-way trail. The Bird Cage Opera House still stands as a mute testimonial of the exciting life of the early '80s. The old Can Can Restaurant is another landmark held over from pioneer times.

"Altogether, Tombstone is a quaint old town which during its boom days could boast of perhaps fourteen thousand souls—and many who evidently had no souls! For years the bad, bad man predominated there and the only law was the law of force backed up by the liberal use of artillery.

"Nor should the visitor to Arizona fail to visit Tucson, one of the oldest cities in the United States. We have many historical points of interest to show people, among which are a few old churches. The San Xavier del Bac Church, erected by Father Kine in 1692, is one of the best-preserved missions in the southwest and is located about nine miles to the southeast of Tucson. The Tumacacon Mission is located about halfway between Tucson and Nogales and is another interesting building.

"Then, while viewing these old missions, why not drop down into Nogales, Arizona, and cross over into Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, there being nothing to divide the towns, except a high wire fence along the international line? The people in both towns live in quite a primitive style which can only be appreciated by actual observance.

"To the west of us are the Casa Grande Ruins, the oldest known communal ruins in the United States. Then on toward Phoenix, over in the Salt River Valley, are many cliff villages and remains of Indian villages, the history of which has been lost in antiquity. All along the Gila River can be seen evidences of prehistoric habitation. There are wonderful picture rocks scattered over the southeastern corner of Arizona. Twenty miles east of Tucson, at Vail, is the Colossal Cave with its already discovered thirty miles of tunnels and many more to be discovered in the future."

This will give Ned some idea of what he should see out in Arizona. He'll also find many ranches, some of which he should visit. And this reminds me of a letter from J. L. P., of Houston, Texas. "Can you tell me of a ranch out in the Rockies, preferably in Montana, Mr. North? I'm looking for an outfit out that way where I can enjoy real Western life on my fall vacation."

The Bar Lazy D. N. seems to me to about fill the bill. This is a typical Western outfit, situated in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, at an elevation of five thousand feet, almost on the Continental Divide and nine miles southwest of Glacier Park Station on the main line of the Great Northern Railway.

In fact, the Treasure State has much to offer seekers after recreation as well as seekers after the precious metal. However, it is the latter subject that is interesting Mike Mc., of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, these days. "I'm an old miner, Mr. North, who is searching for some information about the gold mining up in Fairbanks, Alaska. I've heard that that town is coming back as a producer of gold and would like very much to have the facts on this subject."

Mike has been correctly informed. This season two huge dredges are at work in the Fairbanks district with the promise of profitable production, according to George C. Dickens, representative of the Alaska Railroad. This is the beginning of gold production in the Fairbanks district on a new basis. After a long period of preparation, the gravels of the region are to be handled on a larger scale through a highly developed plant and heavy machinery. This method of placer and hydraulic

mining is to supplant that used by prospectors at the time of the great rush thirty years ago.

These preparations for the large scale working of the gravels in the Fairbanks region have been going on for two or three years. It is a huge undertaking on which ten million dollars were spent before any production began. As can be imagined, the cost of transporting heavy machinery to so isolated a spot has been great. The dredges used in these operations are huge. A power plant has been established and a vast quantity of piping has been taken in. Automobile trucks have been introduced and roads built upon which they might operate. All these materials and supplies have come over the Alaska Railroad.

Mike will be interested to hear that Fairbanks has been picking up considerably. In boom times this town boasted twenty thousand inhabitants, but had declined to two thousand before this recent activity got under way. Already the population has gone up to four thousand, and when the scheme for large scale gravel washing becomes fully operative it will doubtless mount higher.

And while we are on this subject of gold mining I must tell you hombres that are interested in the topic that I've had a recent letter from our old friend, Jack S., of Fort Jones, California. This old-timer says that there have been some very good strikes out in Siskiyou and Trinity Counties lately, and he volunteers to send information to any readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE who are interested. Letters addressed to Jack S., in care of this department, will be promptly forwarded.

RAISE YOUR OWN ONIONS

THE onion, once an unconsidered trifle, is now at last in good odor and has even received the patronage of the government. The yearly production of onions in the United States is about 20,000,000 bushels a year, and the government experts advocate onion-raising as a health-giving and peaceful pursuit. It affords, besides, a reasonable living without a too great expenditure of capital, thus coming within the reach of the man of moderate means.

There are, of course, varieties of onions and, like humans, each one thrives in the locality best adapted to its peculiarities. The Bermuda onion flourishes in Texas, principally in the Rio Grande Valley, and under the most favorable conditions has yielded as much as 35,000 pounds an acre. But this is exceptionally high, and the average yield is the still respectable figure of about 10,000 pounds. The Egyptian onion, it is said, thrives in the alluvial delta region of the Mississippi River, and the Valencia onion has established itself in New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and other Western States.

In addition to coming of a very good family—for the odorous onion is closely related to the lily, and connected with smilax and asparagus—it has also the claim of long descent. It has an ancient history. It was highly prized even in early times as an article of food, and those who traveled over the desert took it with them as a preventive of thirst. It is perhaps curious to reflect that one never sees mention of this vegetable among the food supplies of the prospectors in the West.

The onion was grown originally in southern Asia, and it has journeyed far.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any changes in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

SMITH, GERALD ALLEYNE.—Twenty-six years old. A wrestler. His first wife died, leaving a son. My first husband and I were separated on June 11, 1911, and Gerald went with his father. Last heard from in Wheeling, West Virginia. Information concerning him appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Pearl Smith Gordon, Box 1317, Whispering Pines Ranch, Casper, Wyoming.

MARSHAL, MIKE.—Thirty-seven years old. Formerly of New York City. Last heard from in Munday, Texas. Let me explain. Please write to Mrs. Frances McCarthy, Box 781, Colorado, Texas.

MOODY, SUSIE.—Brothers are: Jim, Ollie and Alex, and sisters are: Dora and Laura. Please write to your niece, Amelia Cowling Dickerson, Box 296, Thermopolis, Wyoming.

BLANCHARD, GEORGE.—Last heard from in Horatio, Arkansas, in 1921. Please write to your friend, Amelia Cowling Dickerson, Box 296, Thermopolis, Wyoming.

SIMMONS, LLOYD.—Son of Lena and Willie Simmons. Wife's name is Edythe. Enlisted at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, November 3, 1919. Contracted tuberculosis and was sent to a navy hospital in California. Later worked on a street car in Los Angeles. Has not reported to pension department since September, 1926. Information appreciated by his anxious mother, Mrs. Lee McMurtry, Mountain View, Arkansas.

HAZELWOOD, BETSY.—Last heard from in Dallas, Texas, in June, 1927. Please write to your old schoolmate, George B., care of this magazine.

KIMBALL, RAY.—Last heard from in West Point, in 1927. Please write to your old friend, Margaret of Newburg, same address.

O'ROURKE, CATHERINE.—Last heard from three years ago when living at 1703 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois. Please write to Joe Stone, 30 Boyd Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

HALL, ERNEST O.—Have never forgotten you and the happy hours we spent together. Would like to know where and how you are and what you have been doing these thirteen years that have passed. Please write to Adelyn, care of this magazine.

BUD.—Please send your address. Important news. Mud, same address.

PIERCE, MARY.—Lived at one time at 1732 South Clinton Avenue, Trenton, New Jersey. Last heard from in 1918. Information appreciated by Joel E. Lightner, Company C, Fourth Infantry, Fort Missoula, Montana.

C. H. B.—Important. Please send your address to A. G. B., care of this magazine.

HENDERSON, LEE.—About sixty years old. Last heard from in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, about thirty years ago. Information concerning him or any of his relatives appreciated by his daughter, who was left, when five years old, with a Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mayer, who lived on a farm near Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Mrs. Ada Wise, Route 5, Box 155, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

KELLY, JACK.—Sad news about Bob. Please write to your mother, who needs you. Mrs. R. P. Kelly, 1036 Elysian Fields Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana.

MASSEY, ERNEST.—Stayed at the Stafford Hotel in Worcester, Massachusetts, at one time. Last heard from in Cleveland, Ohio. Please write to Doris Gerow, care of this magazine.

BRANDT, HARTMUL G.—Last heard from in Oakland, California. Information appreciated by his father, J. E. Brandt, Box 214, Farmington, Missouri.

MORON, PETE, TOM MORGAN, and **EVAN WARLINGTON.**—Please write to your old pal, Brunett Slim, care Antlers Pool Room, Sheridan, Wyoming.

MURRAY, LEO VICTOR.—Last heard from in Wyoming, where he was working on the railroad. Information appreciated by C. A. Porter, Box 135, Middleboro, Massachusetts.

BOLTON, JOSEPH S.—Formerly of Gorham, Maine. Went to Ventura, California, in search of gold. Later worked for a man named Peeks. Last heard from he was crossing the desert with a herd of horses. Information appreciated by his son, Ralph Edward Bolton, R. F. D., Hampton Falls, New Hampshire.

BOLTON, GRACE.—Last heard from when I returned from Cuba after the Spanish-American War. Please write to your brother, Ralph Edward Bolton, R. F. D., Hampton Falls, New Hampshire.

PAPINEAU, ERNEST.—Last heard from when he was a brakeman on the C. & N. W. Railroad. Have news of interest to you. Please write to your old chum, Cyril, care of this magazine.

HERBERT, LLOYD LEE and **MAUDE E.**—Ages, twenty-four and thirty-three, respectively. Believed to be in Kansas City, Missouri. Information appreciated by Doctor Harry Herbert, 2213A North Thirteenth Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

MIZE, CALVIN.—We love you and want to see you. Please come home to your babies and wife, Mrs. Calvin Mize, Route 5, Greenville, South Carolina.

THORNGREN, LOIS.—Dad and mother forgive you. Please write or come home at once. Mrs. V. J. Thorngren, same address.

FULLER, JENNIE.—About twenty-four years old. Formerly of Smock, Pennsylvania. Last heard from in Ohio. Information appreciated by her cousin, William S. Grindle, U. S. S. "Milwaukee," care Postmaster, San Francisco, California.

DAKE, A. B.—Will never forget you. Have good news about myself for you. Please write and tell me about your family and your situation. B. M. M., care of this magazine.

SHEATS, MICKEY.—Hurry back. We need you. I love you still. Olive Boe, Red Oak, Iowa.

ROSENCRAUSE, MARGIE DELORES.—Last heard from in San Diego, in 1926. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to Friend, care of this magazine.

ELLIS, TOM.—My stepfather. Last heard from near St. Joseph, Missouri. Please write to I. A. McDonnal, Mt. Harris, Colorado.

CROMPHLIN, SAM and **FRANK.**—Ages, sixty-one and twenty-two, respectively. Please write to Johnnie Brasher, Route 1, Trousdale, Oklahoma.

LEONARD, S. C.—Last heard from in Denver, Colorado, December 1, 1927. Letters to you returned. Am worried. Please write to Daisy, care of this magazine.

MILLER or **BROWN, L. B.**—Last heard from in Portland, Oregon, in June, 1927. Remember the rabbit's foot? Information concerning her appreciated by W. N., care of this magazine.

KITCHEN, LLOYD, or **WILLIAM KELLY.**—Important. Please write to me at once. Marie, care of this magazine.

RAY.—Your letter and picture arrived O. K. Am glad it is not so. You are forgiven. Every one well. Your sister, Ruth T., care of this magazine.

CLARKE, GEORGE.—About twenty-two years old. Was a student at Townsend-Harris High School, New York City, in 1920. Information concerning him appreciated by Wesley Vega, 115 East Ninety-sixth Street, New York City.

WRIGHT, MRS. F. E., nee **INEZ ADDIE SCOTT.**—About twenty-three years old. A blonde. Last heard from in Alameda, California. Has a child about five years old. Sisters anxious. Information appreciated by them. F. G. A., care of this magazine.

BROWN, ALFRED A.—Formerly of Wyoming. Last heard from in Ontario, California, in 1925. Information concerning him appreciated by Mrs. A. A. Brown, General Delivery, San Pedro, California.

DOW, WENDELL PHILLIPS.—We are all well. Would like to hear from you. Please write to your brother, Warren, care of this magazine.

HOLLAR, MARIE.—My mother. I was born April 25, 1904, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was adopted by a Mrs. Brogans, who died before she told me anything about my mother. I have a slip of paper signed by my mother when she gave me to Mrs. Brogans. It was witnessed by a Mrs. William Lawther. Am anxious to find my mother and Mrs. Lawther or any one who knows anything about them. Please write to Daughter, care of this magazine.

BROGANS, or EBNER, TED.—My brother by adoption. Last heard from in Colorado, in 1910. Believed to have gone to Alaska. Information appreciated by Margaret Brogans, care of this magazine.

DEBAVN, JOSEPH, and children.—Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri, twenty years ago. Information appreciated by W. H. Bennet, Adna, Washington.

BODAH, ALEXANDER.—I still love you. Please do not be afraid to come back to your wife and four children, who want you. Mrs. Alexander Bodah, Box 223, Shirley, Massachusetts.

ANDERSON, REGINA, LOUISE, EBBA or JOHANNA.—Formerly of Lake County, California. Information appreciated by their brother, Alfred E. Anderson, care of this magazine.

CLEMENTZ, C. W.—Last heard from in Florida. A traveling salesman. Have good news for him. Please write to Ola Johnson, 405 Walnut Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

OWEN or FINCHUM, RUTH.—About twenty years old. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan, in 1923-26. Have news for you. Please write to your old friend, Edmund F., care of this magazine.

OSCAR.—Am anxiously waiting for a letter. Have important things to tell you. Frances, care of this magazine.

WAGNER, KINNEY.—Black hair and brown eyes. Please write to your old buddy, Frank Newson, Route 3, Duncan, Oklahoma.

FRED.—Please let us hear from you at once. Clyde Lambert, care of this magazine.

LEISHMAN, ROBERT.—Last heard from in April, 1927, when he was in Monee, Illinois. Information appreciated by his anxious mother, Mrs. Leishman, 610½ Montana Street, Butte, Montana.

WALDRON, RAYMOND.—Last heard from in Miami, Florida. Information appreciated by his brother, Wallis Waldron, New Paltz, New York.

BISHOP, HARLAND J., and wife HELEN.—Both mutes. Have a son and daughter. Formerly of North and South Dakota and Riverside, California. Last heard from in Wellington, Texas, in 1926. Parents are ill and want to hear from them. Please write to Thomas E. Bishop, 769 East Broadway, Portland, Oregon.

KARGER, MAMIE.—Do you remember the boat trip to San Francisco? Please write to J., care of this magazine.

REMES or REMUS.—Information concerning any by either of these names appreciated by Kathleen Marie Remes, care Hotel Dixon, 645 Michigan Avenue, East, Jackson, Michigan.

HARDEN, CHARLES RAYMOND.—Believed to be traveling on some ship. Information appreciated by M. Cooper, 469 Vernon Street, San Francisco, California.

JENKINS, JAMES.—Left New Brookland, South Carolina, April 8, 1928, with Carl Knight, en route for Tuckerman, Arkansas. Last heard from in Oxford, Mississippi. Please write to Mert, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Will the lady from one of the Southern States, who fourteen years ago sought a man named Cowley from Canada to settle a claim, please write to J. C., care of this magazine.

WORDEN, JOHN F.—Must get in touch with you immediately. Information concerning him appreciated by F. L. W., care of this magazine.

SCHOENBERGER, ROBERT H.—About forty years old. A blond. Over six feet tall. Left El Dorado, Arkansas, in spring of 1924. Information appreciated by Bibby, care of this magazine.

STERLING, WILLIAM.—Married Clara Bell Fortune in Arkansas, thirty-eight years ago. Had a son and daughter. He was raised by his uncle George in Jewell County, Kansas. Information concerning him appreciated by his daughter, Irene Buzza, via Idaho City Stage Line, Boise, Idaho.

COTA, GUY.—About fifty-one years old. Last heard from in Port Arthur, Texas, twenty years ago. Information appreciated by his niece, Bernice Cota, R. R. 3, Bloomington, Indiana.

LEE, ARTHUR C.—Formerly of Searcy, and Light, Arkansas. Has sisters, Rachel and Gertie. Good news for you. Please write to M. E., care of this magazine.

ROY, T. B.—Understand your marriage. None of us against you. Shall always love you. Sis, care of this magazine.

NOLAN, THELMA.—Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri. Please write to your school friend, who is anxious to hear from you. Anna Klages, 4438 South Thirty-seventh Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

PARKER, JOE.—In 1916 he was at a naval-training station, as a baker. Believed to be in Philadelphia. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to L. E. R. G., care of this magazine.

MARTINCO, HELEN.—Last heard from in Port Clinton, Ohio, in 1925. Information concerning her appreciated by M. B., care of this magazine.

SPURBERY, MADIE.—Last heard from in Burdette, Arkansas. Believed to be in Mississippi. Information appreciated by Dave Rivers, Fort Crockett, No. G16, Galveston, Texas.

L. I. E., who advertised for **G. L. E.**—We are holding letters for you at this office. Please send your address.

M. C. S.—Of course I forgive you. Will go to Kinney's until you send for me. Please write to O. R. S., care of this magazine.

CROWHURST, HARRY.—Left Maidston, Kent, England, for Canada, several years ago. Has a sister, Emily. Information appreciated by his niece, Mrs. Emily Dakin Carter, 94 Alice Street, Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

HANES, JIM.—Left Maidston, Kent, England, for Canada, several years ago. Information appreciated by his cousin, Mrs. Emily Dakin Carter, 94 Alice Street, Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

BENEDICT, A. J.—We all love you. Barbara cries for you. I am heartbroken. Please let me write to you. Will never cease hoping to see you. Mommie, care of this magazine.

SEIGEL, MELVIN.—Was at one time a sailor of the U. S. S. "New Mexico." Last heard from in San Pedro, California, in 1926. Would like to hear from you. Emma A. Croft, 361 Nineteenth Street, corner of K, Merced, California.

MURPHY, JOHN J.—Last heard from in San Francisco, California, when en route to Sacramento, California. Important news. Please write to Babe, care of this magazine.

DOUGHERTY, JOE.—Last heard from in Brownsville, Texas, in 1924. Was a sailor of the U. S. S. "Oklahoma." Important news for you. Please write to Emma A. Croft, 361 Nineteenth Street, corner of K, Merced, California.

BENSON, JESSIE.—Last heard from in Frederick, Oklahoma, in 1926. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to your half sister, Mrs. Jewel Warren, Roswell, New Mexico.

SEALANDER, BERTHA AMELIA, HARRY J. SAND and SADIE LANG SAND.—My sister, my brother and my sister-in-law. Last heard from in March, 1915, at my mother's funeral in New York City. Information concerning them or their children appreciated by Adelaide Sand Wood Miller, care Mrs. J. Cronin, 127 La Bell Street, Mt. Washington Station, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

AHO, SOFA, or JOHN PATROLA.—Placed their baby girl, Cecilia Amanda Aho, born April 13, 1900, in a home in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. Hazel Mardue, 123 West Boston Street, Seattle, Washington.

BUTCH, L.—Please write to Hazel, 123 West Boston Street, Seattle, Washington.

JOHNSON, J. E.—All is forgiven. I love you. Let us start all over again. I need you. Please write to your wife, Annie, care of this magazine.

FRANKLYN, HOWARD CHARLES.—About twenty-five years old. Born in Brooklyn. Please write to your half sister, Jule Franklyn, 954 Sixth Street, La Salle, Illinois.

NORTON, SAM.—Forty-eight years old. Blue eyes, black hair and dark complexion. Has his sons, Ernest and Demion, with him. Last heard from in West Line, Arkansas. Information appreciated by his brother, George Norton, Erwin Route, Hugo, Oklahoma.

HONEY BOY.—Whenever you want to come home mother and daddy will be waiting for you. I have paid B.'s and D. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

TED and RED.—Do you remember the smallpox in middle Texas? If so, please write to M., care of this magazine.

BOWMAN, SALLIE.—Last heard from in Jacksonville, Florida, when living near the Seaboard shops. Please write to Mix, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, MR. and MRS.—Had a Chevrolet touring car and lived in Phoenix, Arizona. Please write to Mrs. M., care of this magazine.

McLENNAN, DAVID.—Twenty-eight years old. Light hair and brown eyes. Has a scar on neck. Left home twelve years ago. Last heard from in California when he was in the Flying Corps of the United States army. Please write to your sister, Marion, care of this magazine.

COLLINS, TEX.—Formerly of Lowell, Arizona. Have very important news for you. Please write at once to R. F. G. C., care of this magazine.

HART, THOMAS WILFORD.—About twenty-seven years old. A painter. Lived at one time at 993 Highland Avenue, Beaumont, Texas. Last heard from in Abilene, Texas, January 17, 1928. Please write to your brother, G. W. H., care of this magazine.

RATHBONE, RUTH or **PAUL,** and **ELDON LA REMA.**—Please write to your father, Ed. Rathbone, 1635 East Eighty-seventh Place, Los Angeles, California.

HICKS, HERMAN.—Last heard from in Greeley, Colorado, in 1924. Family anxious to hear from you. Please write to your niece, Dorothy Johnson, 228 North Park Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

CRAVER, PAT and **BERTHA.**—Last heard from in Wortham, Texas, in 1925. Information appreciated by Mrs. Willis Boykin, Route 4, Box 54, Aberdeen, Mississippi.

DODDS, ALBERT L.—Twenty-two years old. Blue eyes, hair almost white, and fair complexion. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Victoria Dodds, Route 4, Box 49, Aberdeen, Mississippi.

VON PETZOLD, RICHARD, and **FRED PETZOLD.**—My father and brother. Please come at once or send your address to Jennie M. Petzold, care of this magazine.

ELDER, J. E. or **TEX.**—Formerly of Lampasas County, Texas. Was with the Sixth United States Cavalry at Vondome, France. Please write to your buddy, M. D. Lusk, Box 143, Cedar Keys, Florida.

LYNCHE, HENRY.—Was at one time with Troop M, Sixth Cavalry, at Santa Fe, New Mexico. Please write to your buddy, M. D. Lusk, Box 143, Cedar Keys, Florida.

CROWELL, R.—An ex-trooper of the Sixth United States Cavalry. Last heard from in Durango, Colorado. Do you remember the games in the barracks? Please write to M. D. Lusk, Box 143, Cedar Keys, Florida.

FLORENCE, WILLIAM T.—Sixty-eight years old. Tattooed on both arms and chest. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Anna Florence, 331 Commerce Street, Wellsville, Ohio.

OLIVER, DONALD.—Of Iola, Kansas. Please write to your pal, Charles L. Glassburn, 1020 Forest Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

WILLIAMS, JOHNNY.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Information appreciated by his cousin, Mrs. Viola Blevins, Ulan, Oklahoma.

WILSON, MRS. BESSIE.—Last heard from in Dallas, Texas. Mother worried. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Ola Blevins, Ulan, Oklahoma.

LEMBACH, CARL O.—Please let me know where you are and I will join you. Adele, care of this magazine.

RENO, C. T.—Important news about mother's estate. Please write to your sister, Nancy Clark, R. R. 2, Box 101, Boley, Oklahoma.

COOK, LILLIAN.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in 1924-25. Had recently married Ed Tierney. Our letters returned. Information appreciated by Mrs. D. M. Smith, 605 Main Street, Daytona Beach, Florida.

ALLYN, EARL.—Drove a sight-seeing bus in Los Angeles, California, in 1924-25. Sister's name was Lillian Cook. Please write to Mrs. D. M. Smith, 605 Main Street, Daytona Beach, Florida.

POPE, I. T.—A plastorer. Wife's name was Lena and son's name was Wilbur. Believed to be in Los Angeles, California. Information appreciated by Mrs. D. M. Smith, 605 Main Street, Daytona Beach, Florida.

WHITTLE, CLEO ELMER or **CHARLES.**—Twenty-three years old. Was discharged from the U. S. S. "Nevada," on February 10, 1927, at San Francisco, California. Left San Francisco, California, for Phoenix, Arizona, on February 14, 1927, as his brother Mack had died at St. Joseph's Hospital. Believed to be in Missouri. Information appreciated by M. E. B., care of this magazine.

BRAY, HELEN.—Am very ill. Please write to me at once. E. J. Thompson, care of this magazine.

DEVER, JOSEPH R.—Mother ill and wants to hear from you. Please write to your sister, Elsie, care of this magazine.

PATTERSON, MRS. CLARENCE, nee **DOROTHY PRATT.**—Lived in Long Beach, California, in 1924. Married a sailor who was on the U. S. S. "Arizona." Information appreciated by Pauline L. Keiso, Route 2, Kennewick, Washington.

SULLIVAN, AUBRY LEE.—Last heard from in Kiefer, Oklahoma. Please write to your old pal, Acie Bryant, care of this magazine.

BOGGES, HARVEY.—Last heard from in Arkansas. Information appreciated by his half brother, Claude Bogges, Minco, Oklahoma.

COLLINS, JOSEPH JOHN.—An electrician. Blue eyes and gray hair. Last heard from in November, 1926. I miss you. Please write to your Seattle Baby, N. J. P., 311 West Smith Street, Seattle, Washington.

SHAW, EARL.—Thirty-eight years old. Bald and blue eyes. Was in the World War. Enlisted from Modesto, California. Last heard from when staying at the Hotel Leo, San Francisco, in May, 1927. Please write to your anxious sweetheart, Anna Reed, 556 San Fernando Road, Los Angeles, California.

PERKINS, RAYMOND.—Formerly of Live Oak, Florida. Please write to your sister, Gracie Gary, 1021 Eleventh Avenue, North, Birmingham, Alabama.

SCHUSTER, EVERET.—Last heard from in Hershey, Nebraska, in March, 1928. Have news for you. Please write to your pal, Betsey, care of this magazine.

DANIELS, FRANKLYN.—Received your welcome letter. You are forgiven. Please come home. We are holding letter for you at this office. Address, Mother, care of this magazine.

STANLEY, JACK or **TEX.**—Last heard from in San Pedro, California, in December, 1927. Has a mole under left eye. I have Fuzz with me. We want to hear from you as soon as possible, as we have good news. Please write to Esther Cole, Box 270, Prescott, Arizona.

L. E. W.—Honeybunch, please come home at once, we want you so. Your Honeylamb, E. J. W., care of this magazine.

BARNES, HOWARD E.—Twenty-nine years old. A blond. Please write to your wife, Mrs. Bessie Barnes, 340 Chestnut Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

HANKS, WALLIE.—About fifty years old. Last heard from in 1927, in Reno, where he was a salesman. Information appreciated by Tomey, care of this magazine.

McKINNON, D. O.—Believed to be in Kansas City, Missouri, employed by the N. P. R. R. Information appreciated by Tomey, care of this magazine.

LAMBETH, D. O.—A painter and bookkeeper. Believed to be in California. Information appreciated by Tomey, care of this magazine.

HUFFMAN, I. D.—Your mother is in a very critical condition. If you cannot come home, please let us hear from you. Your dad, H. F. Huffman, 231 Huron Avenue, Boyalusa, Louisiana.

LANGLY, MRS. MYRTLE.—Twenty-five years old. Left Dallas, Texas, in July, 1926. Information appreciated by her mother, Mrs. Ida Beams, Route 1, Gordo, Alabama.

BEEMAN, HOWARD EDSON.—Last heard from when serving in the United States army, at Headquarters Battery, Fifty-ninth Coast Artillery, Fort Mills, Philippine Islands. Information appreciated by Kenneth Lewis Beeman, U. S. S. "Langley," care Postmaster, San Francisco, California.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of the boys who were in Company E, Twenty-eighth Infantry, First Division, at Camp Dix, New Jersey, during 1921-22. G. B. Braswell, 930 Webb Avenue, Burlington, North Carolina.

OHM, WILLIAM.—About nineteen years old. Last seen when we were in the Good Shepherd's Home in Portland, Oregon. He was then about four years old. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Mildred Ohm Harmon, Oak Terrace, Minnesota.

RYAN, JOE R.—About fifty-five years old. A traveling salesman. Formerly of Anthony, Kansas. Last heard from en route to Wichita, Kansas. Have important news for you. Please write to the Reverend Charles A. Hatfield, Lansing, Kansas.

SLONIKER, RAYMOND, or **RICHARD BLOOM.**—We need you. Please write to your wife, P. S., care of this magazine.

COVINGTON, H. G.—Lived in Covington, Georgia, in 1914. Last heard from in Lindale, Georgia. Information appreciated by A. M. S., care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, DOLLY, nee **SLAYTON.**—Thirty-five years old. Believed to be a widow with five or six children. Last heard from in Yuma, Arizona. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. L. Slayton, R. R. 1, Box 412, Porterville, California.

GUETTERMAN, LEO, or **GEORGE LEE.**—About thirty-three years old. A World War veteran. Has a silver plate in the back of his head. Last heard from in Oklahoma. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Freda Brazil, 1216 Oak Street, Beardstown, Illinois.

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